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SOCIAL REALISM AND FAIRY-TALE MANNERISM
IN DICKENS' LATE NOVELS

by



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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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The undersigned certify that they have read,
and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
for acceptance, a thesis entitled: "Social Realism
and Fairy-tale Mannerism in Dickens' Late Novels,"
submitted by Adriana Albi in partial fulfilment of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis involves an examination of Dickens' view of society and of social reform in relation to the fairy-tale elements in his last four novels: Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend. It is based on the belief that the world of the last novels, in spite of critical opinion to the contrary, is neither completely realistic or fantastic. It is a blend of social realities and fairy-tale illusions; of aspects of everyday life, of horror, of nightmare, and of wish-fulfilment dream. I have described the vision of life which encompasses these extremes as a "fairy-tale vision," one which sees the fantastic in the everyday, and the everyday in the ideal or dream. This vision of life expresses itself in a literary manner which fuses a realistic portrayal of social evils and fairy-tale elements. Dickens seems to be working according to the principle that realism can be heightened by the intrusion of fantasy. Thus in novels in which society is viewed and judged most harshly, fairy-tale elements are deepest. In the last novels Dickens presents society as a prison, as an inferno, a tomb, a nightmare landscape of decaying houses, dust-heaps, dirty, winding streets, and a black river which yields its dead to human birds of prey. But in this society children and adults undergo fairy-tale transformations through the help of fairy godparents and live out fairy-tale situations.

Chapter I will deal with critical judgments of Dickens' work showing how the critics have focused on one aspect and ignored others; how they have seen him, primarily, as a realist and social critic or as

an imaginative, humorous writer with little understanding of social situations, and thus failed to come to terms with his complex style and vision of life. Chapter II will suggest how the real and surreal elements in Dickens' novels are encompassed by his "fairy-tale vision" and the literary manner it produced. Chapter III will establish the development of a "fairy-tale vision" in Dickens' childhood and show how in his maturity he becomes aware of the fairy tale as a literary genre and of the role this genre plays in the development of the child, a problem much debated in his age. Dickens is seen championing the fairy tale and "fancy" (and thereby humane sympathy) in an age which is hostile to both. Chapter IV will examine Dickens' use of fairy-tale elements as structural devices in the last novels and also his use of the world of fairy as an ironic contrast and commentary on the society of his age. I will conclude my discussion by noting how Dickens' attitude toward the fairy tale and its vision changed with the passing of time as indicated in the last novels.

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CHAPTER I

CRITICAL JUDGMENTS OF DICKENS

Any writer who produces as much as Dickens did automatically creates a problem for the critics; that is, which is the "true" Dickens -- the "early Dickens" of Sketches by Boz and Pickwick Papers, the "middle Dickens" of Dombey and Son and David Copperfield, or the "late Dickens" beginning with Bleak House and culminating with Our Mutual Friend? Our problem is magnified if the author's style and ideas are continuously evolving as a result of changes in his personality and his social environment. Dickens wrote at a point of crisis for modern society, and this sense of crisis is featured very strongly in his major work. Dickens' age is the age of victory for middle-class liberalism as a result of the First Reform Bill (1832), of victory for the new industrial classes as a result of the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), of the publication of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels (1848), of a series of nationalist revolutions in Europe (1830's and 1848), and of the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species (1859).¹ In short, his was an age of political, economic, scientific, moral, and religious upheaval. Though Dickens, unlike his great contemporaries, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold, was not a theorist -- political, economic, religious, or otherwise -- he was very much aware of events occurring around him and able to shape and transpose them into his art.

It is in the scope and depth of his work and the fact of his evolving style that Dickens has posed a major problem for critics with air-tight theories of the novel. A survey of Dickens criticism reveals

a jumble of conflicting, often self-contradictory, rigid, exclusive judgments. These judgments fail to do justice to the total complexity of his work.

Dickens has been described by critics as one or combinations of the following: as a humorist and caricaturist, as a social critic and reformer, as a writer of sentimental, melodramatic popular literature, as a realist, as a mythologist, as a poet, as an allegorist, and as a symbolist. In the mouths of different critics these pronouncements have implied either praise or scorn. The earliest critical view of Dickens was as a humorist. John Forster begins his biography and critical appraisal of Dickens thus: "Charles Dickens, the most popular novelist of the century, and one of the great humorists that England has produced, was born at Langport, in Portsea, on Friday, the seventh of February, 1812."² For Forster, none of Dickens' last works, except for A Tale of Two Cities, was artistically successful, because they lacked the humor he saw as the basis of his popularity. He writes:

The resentment against remediable wrongs is as praiseworthy in them as in the earlier tales; but the exposure of Chancery abuses, administrative incompetence, politico-economic shortcomings, and social flunkeyism, in Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Hard Times, and Our Mutual Friend, would not have been made less odious by the cheerier tone that had struck with so much sharper effect at prison abuses, parish wrongs, Yorkshire schools, and hypocritical humbug, in Pickwick, Oliver Twist, Nickleby, and Chuzzlewit.³

Forster's opinion is shared by G. K. Chesterton, who champions Dickens' humor at the turn of the century when the critical tide had turned away from it towards Dickens' criticism of society.⁴

Dickens' dropping of his genial, good-natured, comic, at times farcical mask, was noted, without enthusiasm, by a critic writing in

Blackwood's in 1857:

As a humourist we prefer Dickens to all living men. . . . But gradually his old characteristics have slipped from him. . . . All his inspiration now seems to come from without. . . . A booby . . . assures him that his great strength lies in "going to the heart of our deepest social problems"; and straightway Dickens, the genial Dickens, overflowing by nature with the most rampant hearty fun, addresses himself to the melancholy task, setting to work to illustrate some enigma which Thomas Carlyle perhaps, or some such congenial dreary spirit . . . has left rather darker than before. Another luminary tells him that it is the duty of a great popular writer to be a great moral teacher, and straightway a piece of staring morality is embroidered into the motley pattern Lastly comes the worst tempter of all . . . at whose instigation are elaborated some plebian [*sic*] specimens of all the virtues. . . . The result of some such guidance . . . appears in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, as well as in great parts of both Dombey and Copperfield.⁵

This change in Dickens' style was also noted by John Ruskin, but with delight; though he still felt that Dickens obscured "the essential value and truth" of his writings by his use of caricature, by his "speak[ing] in a circle of stage fire."⁶ It can thus be seen that the description of Dickens as humorist has now become pejorative instead of complimentary and that a new critical view has begun to take shape.

This new view is of Dickens as social critic. Shaw adopts and expands it. In his preface to Hard Times, Shaw sees Dickens as

Karl Marx, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, Carpenter, rising up against civilization itself as against a disease, and declaring that it is not our disorder but our order that is horrible; that it is not our criminals but our magnates that are robbing and murdering us; and that it is not merely Tom All Alone's that must be demolished and abolished, pulled down, rooted up, and made forever impossible so that nothing shall remain of it but History's record of its infamy, but our entire social system.⁷

Shaw makes Dickens into a revolutionary and a writer of sociological tracts and novels. His former "humorous manner," for Shaw, becomes "inessential."

These two opposed judgments of Dickens' work show the general tendency in criticism to make him into a representative of one literary

style or one cause to the exclusion of all others. The result is the discarding of stylistic or thematic aspects of his work which do not fit into the critic's particular thesis. Critics have reacted against extreme views of Dickens' work, but often their reactions are equally extreme. As has been noted, Blackwood's regarded Dickens' social criticism as inane, whereas Ruskin saw his work as "of high national importance." At times, one wonders whether they are all speaking about the same author.

Dickens is neither the genial humorist never ruffled by a serious thought, nor the social theorist preoccupied with the establishment of a new social order. As Orwell wrote, "If Dickens had been merely a comic writer, the chances are that no one would now remember his name," and, "A joke worth laughing at always has an idea behind it and usually a subversive idea."⁸ On the other hand, if he had been merely a critic of contemporary social evils, he also would not be remembered. In fact, he is a blend of both and more.

This same process of balancing critical extremes to arrive at a just appraisal is also necessary when one attempts to determine the quality of Dickens' style. His early readers and critics knew that his characters were one-dimensional representations of physiological or psychological aberrations (in Jonsonian terms, "humour characters"), or types of good and evil, and that his plots were arranged to bring these characters into as many situations as possible evoking tears, fears, or laughter. But they approved of this, because these conventions were a part of their consciousness.⁹ Later critics, judging according to "realistic criteria," could not come to terms with the world of Dickens' novels and therefore rejected him.

David Masson, writing in 1859, places Dickens in the "Ideal or Romantic School" of novelists and contrasts him with Thackeray whom he places in the "Real School." For Masson, the world of the "Ideal" novelist is one of "semi-fantastic conditions"; its "situations and scenery often [lying] in a region beyond the margin of everyday life."¹⁰ Gissing, a realist, bewails: "It seems never to have occurred to him, thus far in his career, that novels and fairy tales (or his favorite Arabian Nights) should obey different laws in the matter of incident."¹¹ Although Gissing has noted the "unreal" quality of parts of Dickens' work, he still attempts to make him into a realist. Chesterton accounts for the fantastic or unreal elements by calling Dickens a "mythologist."¹² But this definition simply solves one problem and creates another. What is a mythologist?

Julian Symons takes up Taine's idea that Dickens' "hallucinated" view of the world resembles that of the madman. He sees the dark world of Dickens' last novels as the product of an embittered, unbalanced mind, since Dickens supposedly had lost his fight against bureaucracy and aristocracy and had been disappointed in his personal life. He sees Dickens living in a "room of distorting mirrors" which becomes the world of his novels.¹³ This view undermines the universality and validity of Dickens' criticism of society by attributing it to a sick mind. It completely emasculates the power of his vision.

The "unreal" or "fantastic" elements in Dickens' work are more truthfully accounted for by critics who relate them to the folk tale, as does Robert Morse. He writes:

Dickens has gone underground to that region where the mists of unnameable anxieties and the smoke of infantile terrors prevail. There, at the edge of the sea of sleep, he has built his London. On the opposite shore dwell the Gorgons, Andromeda and Perseus, the Minotaur in the

Cretan maze. The Harpies call across the separating waters to Miss Flite's birds -- Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach.¹⁴

But, just as there is a danger in seeing Dickens' world in the novels as a direct presentation of social reality, there is a danger in over-emphasizing the fantastic aspects of his work.

The various critical judgments of Dickens' work, which have been briefly presented, are all partially correct. In fact, a true appraisal of the work can be reached by combining them and modifying their excesses. Dickens is wholly neither a realist nor a fantast. To see his world as completely imaginary and unreal, supposedly fairy tale (in the way some of his critics have done), is to destroy the universality and validity of his criticism of society. To see it as a photographic reproduction of the life of his time is to deny the existence of surreal events, characters, and specific settings. Dickens' world is neither completely unreal and imaginative, nor is it completely real and everyday. It is a blend of ugly social realities and fairy-tale illusions. As he wrote in his preface to Bleak House, he "purposely [dwells] upon the romantic side of familiar things." His novels, particularly the later ones, contain a blend of aspects of everyday life, of horror, of nightmare, and of wish-fulfillment dream, just as did the fairy tales of Perrault, the chapbook fairy tales, the Arabian Nights, and such literary fairy tales as The King of the Golden River, The Rose and the Ring, and The Water-Babies, being written in England in the mid-nineteenth century. They are the result of his "fairy-tale vision of life," a vision which includes outrageous fun, the horrific, the idyllic, the everyday, and of the literary manner it produced.

CHAPTER II

THEME AND TECHNIQUE IN DICKENS' NOVELS

A study of opinion regarding Dickens' themes and style, particularly in his last novels, reveals the same tendency to compartmentalize, to make him into one thing or another. The result of this critical tendency is the rejecting, ignoring, or criticizing as "weaknesses" of major aspects of his work. I will, first, examine generally the social content of Dickens' novels, since most writers agree that he is offering a criticism of society, though they disagree as to the value of this social criticism.

Every age has its secret sores which it attempts to hide until the collapse and putrefaction of one of the limbs of the social organism forces it to seek medication. This fact is particularly true of English society in the first half of the nineteenth century. The rapid introduction of newly-invented machines and production processes, with little forethought to their effects on the lives of individual workers and the nation as a whole, caused problems which legislators were neither equipped, nor particularly inclined, to deal with. Needed legislation was passed, but often sat in the files of the Circumlocution Office waiting to be implemented. The new factories polluted the water of the streams on which they were built and the air for miles around. Older centers and newly-established ones were unable to accommodate the tremendous number of workers required to run the new industries, and the result was overcrowding of living quarters and lack of adequate sanitation and public health facilities. Rich and poor alike lived in conditions

not highly conducive to either health or happiness.¹

Attempts to remedy these social evils were hampered partly by lack of knowledge as to how they were to be dealt with, but also by the attitude of a significant segment of society that things were as they should be and that the misery of the working masses was ordained by providence. The economist Thomas Malthus wrote that men could never produce sufficient food to feed themselves; therefore, "necessity, that imperious, all-pervading law of nature, restrains them within the prescribed bounds. Among plants and animals its effects are waste of seed, sickness, and premature death. Among mankind, misery and vice."² The segment of the population hardest hit by this avenging fury, Necessity, was inescapably the new working class. David Ricardo's prediction of the fate of the worker was also very bleak. He wrote: "Labour, like all other things which are purchased and sold . . . , has its natural and its market price. The natural price of labour is that price which is necessary to enable the labourers, one with another, to subsist and to perpetuate their race, without either increase or diminution."³ The worker was thus chained to a cycle: scarcity of labor resulting in increased wages, which in turn resulted in an increased birth rate, followed by an excess of labor, drop in wages, starvation, disease, death, and so on.

Dickens was a sensitive writer in an age when men's bodies were often seen as warped by monstrous machines transforming the earth into an inferno, and men's minds as warped by the grim teachings of the "dismal science," political economy.

Many critics have seen Dickens solely as a critic of specific social evils. In fact, Humphry House in his The Dickens World has

treated Dickens as a journalist reporting on the conditions of his age.⁴ This view of Dickens can be easily documented by a brief examination of the novels, especially remembering that Dickens started out as a precocious journalist and parliamentary reporter. One of the first causes which Dickens champions is opposition to the New Poor Law of 1834, inspired by the upholders of the "dismal science." The attack is heard strongly in Oliver Twist, sporadically through the other novels, and, finally, strongly again in Our Mutual Friend. A major evil which the Poor Law was supposed to correct was the use of parish money to relieve the poverty resulting from low wages. The lazy poor were also to be discouraged from living off society, by making conditions in the workhouses as miserable as was decent and thus forcing them to find work.⁵ Dickens noted, in his criticism of the Law, that those who suffered from its implementation were the old who could not work and those who desired to work and could find none (for example, the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard in Little Dorrit). He writes in Our Mutual Friend:

When we have got things to the pass that with an enormous treasure at disposal to relieve the poor, the best of the poor detest our mercies, hide their heads from us, and shame us by starving to death in the midst of us, it is a pass impossible of prosperity, impossible of continuance. It may not be so written in the Gospel according to Podsnappery; you may not 'find these words' for the text of a sermon, in the Returns of the Board of Trade; but they have been the truth since the foundations of the universe were laid, and they will be the truth until the foundations of the universe are shaken by the Builder. This boastful handiwork of ours, which fails in its terrors for the professional pauper, the sturdy breaker of windows and the rampant tearer of clothes, strikes with a cruel and a wicked stab at the stricken sufferer, and is a horror to the deserving and unfortunate. We must mend it, lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, or in its evil hour it will mar every one of us.⁶

This is the outraged voice of the author intruding into the unity of the literary world he has created, just as Betty Higden, the epitome

of the "deserving poor," intrudes into the imaginative world of the novel. Fortunately he does not do this often in his last novels and lets the events and scenes he portrays speak for themselves, and, if he is still not satisfied, speaks out in prefaces.

Throughout his long career, Dickens also promotes educational reform. Criticism of the Yorkshire schools is at the centre of Nicholas Nickleby. Dickens points out in the preface that doctors can be punished for malpractice if they are implicated in the maiming or death of a patient, whereas nothing can be done about the thousands of minds deformed by incompetent teachers. He also criticizes the curriculum of the schools. In Dombey and Son and Hard Times he points out the dehumanizing effect of an education based on the principle of "hard facts" favored by the Utilitarians.⁷ In Our Mutual Friend, he criticizes the inadequacies of the working-class or Ragged Schools.⁸

At the heart of all of Dickens' novels is the ugly picture of an industrial world, a world of polluted rivers and air, of filth and squalor, of misery and vice. In Oliver Twist one of the central characters is Jacob's Island, a horrible slum inhabited by the criminal underworld of London. In his preface Dickens states that he wants to present a true picture of the criminal -- not the idealized, romanticized picture of the picaresque novel or the Beggar's Opera. He will present "the cold wet shelterless midnight streets of London; the foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn; the haunts of hunger and disease; the shabby rags that scarcely hold together" (xvi). Dickens makes the reader see, hear, and smell the refuse-littered streets and houses of Whitechapel and Saffron Hill, and the human refuse which inhabits them. But although his portrayal of London's criminal

world is realistic in comparison to the literature he criticizes, it is still a re-touched portrait, rather than the real thing. Even Mayhew's picture of this class in London Labour and the London Poor falls far short of the horror of the reality.⁹

In Bleak House Dickens develops the theme that the poor do not inhabit a twilight zone cursed by providence, away from the sacred realm of decent citizens. The evils of the poor -- bad housing, sanitation and lack of public health measures -- are also a part of the destiny of the rich. Tom-all-Alone's sits breeding pestilence which will disfigure the faces of the first born of rich and poor alike. This is the price that has to be paid for a prosperity based on the misery of thousands of people.

The criticisms of specific social evils briefly outlined in the preceding discussion have been repeatedly pointed out and documented by critics. But though Dickens' work undeniably contains many criticisms of specific, remediable social evils, this is not all it contains. If this were the case, it would simply be a historical-sociological document like Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor, which catalogues misery and injustice, or Engels' Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844, which promotes political revolution as well. What is significant is the fact that Dickens' criticism of society is specific and local, but at the same time it is also universal and far-reaching. Dickens achieves this effect by his use of symbol.

His method can be seen at work in Little Dorrit. A surface reading of the novel, by a modern, reveals that Dickens is dealing with conditions of life in a debtor's prison, the Marshalsea, which was legally done away with in 1849. A Victorian reader, aware of the

Crimean crisis, would have been struck first by the criticism of the civil service in the Circumlocution Office chapter. The action of the novel is set in the 1820's.¹⁰ Some critics have interpreted these facts as a sign that Dickens was unable to see general historical and social patterns, or that he was politically naive, or downright stupid. A more perceptive critic, Humphry House, points out that although Dickens' socially-critical novels are set in the past, they include contemporary interests.¹¹ In fact, not only do they contain contemporary interests, but they also contain a judgment of the social life of man and of civilization itself.

The uniting symbol of Little Dorrit is the prison. Old Dorrit is imprisoned in the Marshalsea. He finally leaves the prison after nearly twenty-five years of confinement, but the prison atmosphere remains with him until his death. Dickens implies that his was an imprisonment of the spirit which was only heightened by his physical imprisonment in the Marshalsea. Most of the other characters in the novel suffer similarly from rigid, imprisoning ideas about life -- economic, political, religious, or otherwise. For Dickens, civilized life has become a prison. The over-bearing weight of centuries of outworn practices and the new weight of an equally rigid economic view of life based on "hard facts" imprison the consciousness of every man born into society. The position of the young consciousness is visualized in a scene from The Old Curiosity Shop. The narrator states: "I had, ever before me, the old dark murky rooms -- the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air -- the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone -- the dust, and rust, and worm that lives in wood -- and alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the

beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams" (14). The images of decay, dust, wood, stone and prison are continued in the novels following Little Dorrit. The French peasantry are a dead forest, and the aristocracy are stone in A Tale of Two Cities. Age, decay and prison feature in Great Expectations. The dust-heap is the central image of Our Mutual Friend.

In the late novels specific criticisms of society, contemporary or past, are universalized. Characters, settings, and situations become symbols of the life of man in any organized society. Shaw was one of the first critics to notice this, but he went wrong in attempting to make Dickens profess a revolutionary view of history. By the time he wrote the late novels Dickens had given up any hope he might have had of the government's righting social injustices. He wrote to Forster on September 30, 1855:

I really am serious in thinking -- and I have given as painful consideration to the subject as a man with children to live and suffer after him can honestly give to it -- that representative government is become altogether a failure with us, that the English gentilities and subserviencies render the people unfit for it, and that the whole thing has broken down since that great seventeenth-century time, and has no hope in it.¹²

In A Tale of Two Cities he describes social reform by means of revolution and rejects the idea just as he had in Barnaby Rudge. Dickens, in the late novels, expresses a dissatisfaction with the conditions of social man and sees no way of cleaning the Augean Stables of society except perhaps through individual change of heart or reform. Recent critics have seen "the undisciplined heart" as a recurrent theme of the late novels, and the idea of individual reform expanding into social reform is a notion popularized by Carlyle, but as Orwell has noted, "The vagueness of Dickens' discontent is the mark of its permanence."¹³

Beginning with John Ruskin, most of the critics who saw social criticism as the focus of Dickens' work have been at a loss to account for aspects of his style which negate the idea that he is presenting a journalistic account of his world, thought by some critics to be necessary in good social criticism. The aspects of his style considered weak by socially-oriented critics are: characterization, plot (specifically the use of coincidence, horror, sentiment, and the happy ending), and atmosphere. The nature of Dickens' mature style can be determined by examining these aspects of it which the critics consider weak.

The exaggeration and humor favored by his early readers first come under attack. Ruskin writes,

I wish that he could think it right to limit his brilliant exaggeration to works written only for public amusement; and when he takes up a subject of high national importance, such as that which he handled in Hard Times, that he would use severer and more accurate analysis. The usefulness of that work (to my mind, in several respects, the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished because Mr. Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Blackpool a dramatic perfection, instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman.¹⁴

Ruskin has here pointed out the main "weaknesses" of Dickens' characterization -- his tendency to make his characters either the embodiment of good or evil or else monsters or grotesques. His heroes and heroines are virtuous, noble, self-sacrificing, long-suffering, in short, possessing a goodness which is rarely of this world. They are the noble-browed and incorporeal, angelic creatures depicted in the illustrations to his works.

What the good characters lack in vitality and spirit is possessed by the evil characters. These characters possess diabolical cunning when it comes to thwarting the plans of the good characters, and, in fact, at times resemble their underworld master. This can be seen particularly

in Quilp in The Old Curiosity Shop, who eats eggs, shells and all, drinks burning liquids and relentlessly pursues Little Nell and her grandfather like a monstrous, distorted shadow through the countryside, and in Rigaud-Blandois in Little Dorrit, the diabolical gentleman.

The novels also contain a number of grotesque characters or caricatures arranged in the spectrum between good and bad. They form the bulk of the cast. They can be Jonsonian "humour characters" and thus represent psychological aberrations or they can be exaggerations of some physical trait or feature of dress. In the early novels, these characters are primarily comic, whereas, in the later novels, they function in Dickens' satiric portrayal of society.

These characters act in what Julian Symons describes as "elaborately plotted coincidence-filled melodramas."¹⁵ The characters are all related by blood, or dark deeds done in the past which are revealed as the involuted strands of the plot unwind themselves. The coincidence involved in this process has been noted and criticized. Though an attempt can be made to establish the "realism" of his characters ("realism" being a fairly loose critical term, anyway), it certainly cannot be done for his plots. Arnold Kettle, in a discussion of Oliver Twist, separates the perceptive social content of the novel from the plot which he sees as "silly and mechanical and troublesome" and "expres[sing] an interpretation of life infinitely less profound and honest than the novel itself reveals."¹⁶

Another weakness in Dickens' work, in the eyes of socially-oriented and, in many cases, realist critics, is his use of horror and sentiment. Dickens is at his theatrical and commercial best, and, according to some critics, at his literary worst when he makes use of

these devices. Horror features in all his novels, but particularly in his last completed novel, Our Mutual Friend, which offers his severest condemnation of society. The novel begins with the "fishing" for a body in the polluted Thames, which is the literal "food" of the "bird of prey" and the figurative food of the Hexam family. It is significant that Dickens juxtaposes Hexam's deadly fishing for his family's food with a scene at the Veneering table. The words of the "melancholy retainer" continue the somber mood of the preceding episode: "Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men" (9).

The use of sentiment or the deliberate attempt to evoke tears reaches the high water mark in the life and death of Little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop and Paul in Dombey and Son. In the later novels it does not play a major role, although it appears in the thankless service of Little Dorrit to her family, the death of Sydney Carton, and the visions of Jenny Wren, the Dolls' Seamstress.

Another often criticized trait of Dickens' style is his use of the "happy ending." This trait again offers problems to the critics who read his novels as political tracts. In the horrible world Dickens has created, they feel, there cannot be any happy endings; therefore, they seem forced and unreal. These critics point to Great Expectations, a novel in which Dickens had been true to his "dark vision" and left Pip wiser but alone in the first ending, and then the new, sentimental ending which violated the unity and truth of the world of the novel.

Besides his grim, depressing "pictures" of the London slums, Dickens' novels also contain settings which are alive and almost enchanted. This is another peculiarly Dickensian stylistic trait. H.A. Taine noted this in his History of English Literature. He comments on

Dickens' ability to "animate" objects:

Stones for him take a voice, white walls swell out into big phantoms, black wells yawn hideously and mysteriously in the darkness; legions of strange creatures whirl shuddering over the fantastic landscape; blank nature is peopled, inert matter moves. But the images remain clear; in this madness there is nothing vague or disorderly; imaginary objects are designed with outlines as precise and details as numerous as real objects, and the dream is equal to the reality.¹⁷

In the world of Dickens' novels objects take on the properties of their owners. Thus the "Harmony Jail" is tightfisted and miserly even after it has become "Boffin's Bower"; the Clennam house collapses as a result of the guilt of the family; and the stone face on the chateau of the Marquis shares his cruelty and arrogance. The innermost feelings of the characters are often expressed or commented upon by their environment. Thus Pip is called a thief by gates, dykes, banks and oxen as he brings the stolen food to the convict on the marshes, and in A Tale of Two Cities all of nature pursues and attempts to waylay the speeding coach taking the Darnays, Manette, Lorry, Jerry, and Miss Pross away from Paris and danger.

The stylistic traits which have been discussed above -- the simple characters, the use of coincidence, horror, sentiment, the happy ending, and animated atmosphere -- are the aspects of Dickens' work which are peculiarly "Dickensian." Thus any critical judgment which is based on rejecting, ignoring or considering as weaknesses any one or all of them has failed to deal completely with the author's style and his vision of life. Each critic can be said to create a persona of Dickens which is not the real Dickens but rather one of his many distorted images as if he were standing in a hall of mirrors at the fun house at the fair.

The preceding brief survey of theme and technique and attitudes

towards them in Dickens' work has revealed a specific and symbolic treatment of the worst evils existing in society, and, at the same time, what seems to some the grossest violation of the laws of literary probability and reality. But yet the world of Dickens' novels has an internal unity which causes the reader to believe that what he has read is not only possible but probable. The vision of life which encompasses these extremes is the "fairy-tale vision." It has been noted that El Greco suffered from an astigmatism which caused him to see natural objects as elongated and thus produced the unique world of his art. I believe, similarly, that there are psychological and emotional astigmatisms which cause man to see the world in a particular way. Dickens' fairy-tale view of reality -- which sees the fantastic in the everyday and the everyday in the ideal, fantastic or dream -- is this kind of an astigmatism. The literary manner which Dickens adopts, as a result of his peculiar vision, is that of the fairy tale, specifically that of the Arabian Nights, the chapbook fairy tales and the literary fairy tales being written in his age. The peculiarly Dickensian stylistic traits outlined previously -- the simple characters, animated atmosphere, and so on -- become meaningful when studied in relation to the fairy-tale genre. The heightened social realism of the last novels can be seen as the result of what Arnold Kettle describes as "the strengthening of realism by the moment of fantasy" (although Kettle does not see this at work in Dickens' novels).¹⁸ The fairy-tale plots, characters, atmosphere and happy endings of the last novels serve as contrast and ironic commentary on the society which Dickens describes. This process will be examined closely in the last chapter when the late novels, Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend, are discussed individually.

CHAPTER III

QUEEN MAB'S CHARIOT AMONG THE STEAM ENGINES

1. Dickens and the Fairy Tale

The Sun does arise,
 And make happy the skies;
 The merry bells ring
 To welcome the Spring;
 The skylark and thrush,
 The birds of the bush,
 Sing louder around
 To the bells' chearful sound,
 While our sports shall be seen
 On the Ecchoing Green.

William Blake, "The Ecchoing Green," Songs of Innocence.

Dickens' childhood at Portsea and Chatham was not only an extremely happy time; it was idyllic. It was a time of picking flowers, care-free games and dreaming about the enchanted mansion on the hill with its rose garden. It was a time 'when Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything; and 'Nothing is, but thinking makes it so.'"¹ Every blade of grass, every stone, every building is alive with secret meaning: "I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle in the parlour of our little village alehouse."² It is a time when the human spirit does not see through Blake's "perishing and mortal eye", but through the eternal visionary "eye" of the imagination. There is no past or future, no "real" or "make believe." Everything is possible; everything is "eternally present."

Graham Greene writes, "The creative writer perceives his world once and for all in childhood and adolescence, and his whole career is an effort to illustrate his private world in terms of the great public we all share."³ This statement peculiarly fits Dickens' career. His mature vision, which I have described as a fairy-tale vision of reality, is the result of a tempering of the vision of childhood, described above, by the world of experience. For Dickens, childhood came to an end with the move to London, his father's accumulation of debts, the retreat from one house to another, each time in a more impoverished and ugly neighborhood and finally with work in the blacking warehouse.⁴ The lonely, lost boy wanders through the "charter'd streets" of London trying to reconcile the misery and ugliness which he sees around him with the happiness and beauty of his earlier life. He is trapped in this ugly world and fears that perhaps he can never return to the enchanted "garden-world" of his past. He describes the desire to live in a world of fantasy in "A Christmas Tree," in which he visualizes, as an adult, the world of his childhood:

Now, too, I perceive my first experience of the dreary sensation -- often to return in after life -- of being unable, next day, to get back to the dull settled world; of wanting to live for ever in the bright atmosphere I have quitted; of doting on the little Fairy, with the wand like a celestial Barber's Pole, and pining for a Fairy immortality along with her. Ah she comes back, in many shapes as my eye wanders down the branches of my Christmas Tree, and goes as often, and has never yet stayed by me! ⁵

Throughout his lifetime and work Dickens cannot help but contrast these two worlds.

Forster, in his biography of Dickens, sees David Copperfield's reading as that of Dickens himself:

"My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs to which I had access (for it adjoined my own), and which

nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas and Robinson Crusoe came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time -- they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii -- and did me no harm; for, whatever harm was in some of them, was not there for me; I knew nothing of it."⁶

This list can be augmented by that included in "A Christmas Tree."

In that list Dickens mentions the traditional fairy tales, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Ridinghood, the Yellow Dwarf, Dick

Whittington, Tom Thumb and Valentine and Orson. A glance at his readings reveals the same split between fantasy and reality seen in the

events of his early life, although it must be acknowledged that the

"realistic" works in his library -- Roderick Random, Tom Jones,

Robinson Crusoe -- are highly imaginative, in their own right, and that the young boy probably would have been more interested in the fantastic adventures of their heroes than in the views of society presented by the authors.

Although Dickens' fairy-tale vision of life has a basis, as has been indicated, in his personal experience as a child, it is also the product of the author's adult awareness of the fairy tale as a literary genre and the role this genre plays in the development of the child, a problem much debated in the nineteenth century. As Gillian Avery points out in her Nineteenth Century Children, the Georgian regime, under which Dickens grew up, and the nineteenth century in general distrusted fantasy and excluded it from children's literature, which, as a result, consisted of colorless exempla of right and wrong behavior.⁷ She quotes from Mary Jane Kilner's The Memoirs of a Peg-top (1805?): "Anything which a man can possibly make must be incapable of understanding. And

therefore, when a story is written or told where things inanimate are represented as talking or acting, it must be known to be only supposition; as in reality wood cannot feel, nor iron think,"⁸ and Mrs. Sherwood's edition of The Governess, or The Little Female Academy (1820):

Instruction when conveyed through the medium of some beautiful story or pleasant tale, more easily insinuates itself into the youthful mind than any thing of a drier nature; yet the greatest care is necessary that the kind of instruction thus conveyed should be perfectly agreeable to the Christian dispensation. Fairy-tales therefore are in general an improper medium of instruction because it would be absurd in such tales to introduce Christian principles as motive of action On this account such tales should be very sparingly used, it being extremely difficult, if not impossible, from the reason I have specified, to render them really useful.⁹

F. J. Harvey Darton sees this dislike of the fairy tale as "a manifestation in England, of a deep-rooted sin-complex. It involves the belief that anything fantastic on the one hand, or anything primitive on the other, is inherently noxious, or at least so void of good as to be actively dangerous."¹⁰

Dickens was one of the "unfortunate" children who read fairy tales unadulterated by moral quandaries. As a result, his ability to distinguish between "truth" and "fiction" was destroyed early and his stomach sensitized against the digestion of "hard facts" which formed the bulk of the educational program of his age. Because of his inclinations towards fantasy and, perhaps, too, because of his limited formal education, Dickens joins the few who attack the opponents of the fairy tales and, in general, the development of the imagination in the schools. Catherine Sinclair, who wrote Holiday House (1839), one of the first Victorian children's books to deal with real children and not abstractions of good and bad, stated in the introduction:

Every infant is probably born with a character as peculiar to himself as the features of his countenance, if his faults and good qualities were allowed to expand according to their original tendency; but education, which formerly did too little in teaching the 'young ideas how to shoot', seems now in danger of overshooting the mark altogether, by not allowing the young ideas to exist at all. In this age of wonderful mechanical inventions, the very mind of youth seems in danger of becoming a machine; and while every effort is taken to stuff the memory, like a cricket-ball, with well-known facts and ready-made opinions, no room is left for the vigour of natural feeling, the glow of natural genius, the ardour of natural enthusiasm. It was a remark of Sir Walter Scott's, many years ago, to the author herself, that in the rising generation there would be no poets, wits, or orators, because all play of the imagination is now carefully discouraged and books written for young persons are generally a mere dry record of facts, unenlivened by any appeal to the heart, or any excitement to the fancy. The catalogue of a child's library would contain Conversations on Natural Philosophy, -- on Chemistry, -- on Botany, -- on Arts and Sciences, -- Chronological Records of History, and travels as dry as a road-book, but nothing on the habits or ways of thinking, natural and suitable to the taste of children; therefore, while such works are delightful to the parents and the teachers who select them, the younger community are fed with strong meat instead of milk, and the reading which might be a relaxation from study becomes a study itself.¹¹

Dickens began his defense of "fancy" and the fairy tale with his Christmas book, A Christmas Carol, in 1843. His intention in writing these books, as pointed out by Earle Davis in The Flint and the Flame, was to give a "higher form" to the old chapbook manner, and he did this by appropriat[ing] the fairy-tale atmosphere" and preaching a moral.¹² In the life of young Paul in Dombey and Son (1846-48), Dickens shows the education process of the age, described by Catherine Sinclair, at work. Paul's child-like qualities are killed as his father attempts to make him into a copy of himself, and, as a result, the boy dies. In an article in Household Words (June, 1855) Dickens expresses his ideas on the development of the child:

The fancy of a child is -- for the first six or seven years at least, of childhood -- by a great deal the broadest channel through which knowledge and wisdom can be poured into the mind. The flower comes before the fruit, in man as in the tree; and in each case the fruit is developed from the flower. To clip fancy in youth for the sake of getting more wisdom from age, is about as wise a scheme of mental

culture as it would be wise in agriculture to pick off the leaves of appleblossom in the spring, for the sake of getting monster apples in the autumn. The mind has its own natural way of growing, as the body has, and at each stage of growth it asks for its own class of food.¹³

His contemporaries tended to ignore the natural tendencies in the growth of the human personality or consciousness and, as a result, were in danger of producing spiritually deformed individuals.

Dickens' view of the role of "fancy" in the development of the human personality and on the broader level of society and civilization, and the relationship of "fancy" to the fairy tale can be seen to develop in the years between the writing of the Christmas books and Hard Times, in which he makes his harshest and most outspoken attack. In the first issue of Household Words (1850), he states his editorial policy:

No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words. In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished. To show to all, that in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out: -- to teach the hardest workers at this whirling wheel of toil, that their lot is not necessarily a moody brutal fact, excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination, to bring the greater and the lesser in degree, together, upon that wide field, and mutually dispose them to a better acquaintance and a kinder understanding -- is one main object of our Household Words. . . . The swart giants, Slaves of the Lamp of Knowledge, have their thousand and one tales, no less than the Genii of the East; and these, in all their wild, grotesque and fanciful aspects, in all their many phases of endurance, in all their many moving lessons of compassion and consideration, we design to tell.¹⁴

For Dickens, "fancy" or "the sympathies and graces of the imagination," are necessary to man living a life of toil, a life of "brutal fact." Fancy gives beauty and meaning to life. It is a necessary escape.

The relationship between "fancy" and the fairy tale is made

implicit in the essay "Frauds on the Fairies," in which Dickens attacks his former illustrator Cruikshank for making fairy tales into prohibition tracts. He writes,

It would be hard to estimate the amount of gentleness and mercy that has made its way among us through these slight channels. Forbearance, courtesy, consideration for the poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, the love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force -- many such good things have been first nourished in the child's heart by this powerful aid. It has greatly helped to keep us, in some sense, ever young, by preserving through our worldly ways one slender track not overgrown with weeds, where we may walk with children, sharing their delights. . . . The world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it alone.¹⁵

Fairy tales, for Dickens, are thus no longer simply a means of recapturing the happy, idyllic times of his childhood (as in "A Christmas Tree"). They are a part of a vision of life and a judgment of society. Because of their role in keeping alive the imagination in a materialistic age, they prevent man from becoming a machine, an inanimate object. Because Dickens sees individual spiritual reform as the only means of halting the process of civilization towards an Armageddon, the fairy tale and "fancy," as a result of their role in this process, are of supreme importance to the life of man. In his late novels the characters who are destined to achieve rebirth within society are associated with the fairy tale.

In Hard Times (1854) Dickens presents sketchily the results of bringing up children to know only "hard facts." The novel is structured around the bare bones of his theories about the role of fancy in the growth of the individual personality and of the social organism. Automaton enact the struggle between the forces of "hard facts" (Gradgrind and Bounderby) and those of "fancy" (Sissy Jupe and Sleary's Horse-Riding Academy). It is evident that he still has not mastered the problem of how to present his evolving vision of life artistically.

Though Hard Times is a failure in this sense, it does offer the symbol of the childhood garden of the imagination nurtered by the fairy tale which is a major motif of the late novels. Louisa is returning to her father's home after her brother's robbery of Bounderby's bank:

Neither, as she approached her old home now, did any of the best influences of old home descend upon her. The dreams of childhood -- its airy fables; its graceful, beautiful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond: so good to be believed in once, so good to be remembered when outgrown, for then the least among them rises to the stature of a great Charity in the heart, suffering little children to come into the midst of it, and to keep with their pure hands a garden in the stony ways of this world, wherein it were better for all the children of Adam that they should often sun themselves, simple and trustful and not worldly-wise -- what had she to do with these? (197) [Italics are mine.]

In 1855 Dickens employs the fairy tale as a vehicle for social criticism. In "Prince Bull: A Fairy Tale"¹⁶ he attacks the government's handling of the Crimean War. Prince Bull (England) makes war with Prince Bear (Russia), but the war effort, as well as the welfare of the country, is jeopardized by the Prince's fairy godmother -- "Tape." She simply utters the word, "tape" (red tape), and everything goes wrong. In "The Thousand and One Humbugs"¹⁷ he cleverly rewrites the prologue of the Arabian Nights and several tales to point to Parliamentary bungling, profiteering by members of the civil service, the foibles of specific members of parliament, and some failings of society in general. The ruler of the great empire is "Taxedtaurus (or Fleeced Bull)." He is plagued by the inability to find a maiden suitable to become his wife and assume the rank of "Howsa Kummauns (or Peerless Chatterer)." After rejecting his loveliest, youngest wife "Reefawm (or Light of Reason)" the Sultan accepts his Grand Visier "Parmarstoon's (or Twirling Weathercock's)" lovely daughter "Hansardadade" as the next candidate for his favors. As can be seen, these stories are amusing,

but, when compared with his use of fairy tale elements in Little Dorrit to deal with the same problems, they appear insignificant. They are, of course, only journalistic lampoons.

2. Characteristics of Dickens' Literary Manner and that of the Literary Fairy Tales

As has been suggested, Dickens' adult interest in the fairy tale, as a literary genre and as an educational tool, revealed by his numerous articles on the fairy tale in Household Words and references to fairy tales in his novels, must be seen in the context of the age's interest in the fairy tale. Francis Paget, in the preface to his The Hope of the Katzekopfs (1844), begins the defense of the fairy tale and the imagination which is so important in Dickens' work. His narrator, a seventeenth-century expert on fairy lore, writes:

Ah, gentle reader . . . I fear me that you have a larger share of the unbelief of this dull, plodding, unimaginative, money-getting, money-loving nineteenth century, than of the humour and simplicity of the seventeenth. . . . I only wait to see if it be a hopeless task to speak to the youth of the rising generation as I spoke to their forefathers. I would fain learn whether it be possible to excite their sympathies in behalf of anything but themselves . . . and to shake off the hard, cold, calculating wordly, selfish temper of the times, by being brought into more immediate contact with the ideal, the imaginary, and the romantic, than has been the fashion of late years.¹⁸

Paget's book is one of the first of many literary fairy tales written in the 1840's and 1850's during which time the form became an established genre in place of the rewriting of traditional fairy tales. Although this awakened interest in the fairy tale cannot be explained completely, Harvey Darton suggests that it could have been due to the age's increased awareness of children as children and not small adults, and their need for a literature uniquely their own. The growth of interest in children resulted in part from the tremendous increase in

population and also from reform which drew attention to the plight of the child.¹⁹ Some other early literary fairy tales were: Uncle David's Nonsensical Story about Giants and Fairies, in Catherine Sinclair's Holiday House (1839); The Enchanted Doll (1849) by Mark Lemon; The Fairy Godmothers (1851) by Margaret Gatty; The King of the Golden River (1851) by John Ruskin; The Rose and the Ring (1855) by Thackeray; and Granny's Wonderful Chair (1857) by Frances Browne.²⁰

Many of the stylistic elements found in Dickens' novels are also present in the literary fairy tales. Gillian Avery notes that many of the fairy tales written in the period have a strongly moral and didactic flavor, each of the main characters' being reformed of a major vice.²¹ Dickens' Christmas Books (1843-47), his first excursion into the fairy-tale manner, also possessed a moral. Avery also notes that the literary fairy tales often contained a humor which made the moral lesson more palatable and a taste for punishment, the grotesque, and the horrific.²² These elements have also been noted in Dickens' work. The similarities between Dickens' literary manner and the literary fairy tales of the mid-century could be due to the fact that both Dickens and the writers of these tales were influenced by the literary traditions and conventions of the time, specifically, the picaresque tradition of Smollett and Fielding, the conventions of melodrama, the horror of "yellow" publications, the heavy-handed morality of the children's tales of the time, as well as by the traditional fairy tales of Perrault, the brothers Grimm and the chapbooks. There is also the possibility of direct influence, more likely that of Dickens on the writers of fairy tales, particularly those writing in the 1860's. An example of this influence could be the blend of social realism and fantasy -- a

peculiarly Dickensian achievement -- in Charles Kingsley's The Water-Babies (1863).

In order to arrive at a clear understanding of the elements which make up Dickens' unique literary manner, also present, to an extent, in the literary fairy tales being written at the same time, it might be well to examine the conventions which could have influenced him. Critics generally agree on the influence of the writings of Smollett, Fielding and Sterne in Dickens' work.²³ They point to the loosely-organized plots and the farcical humor of the early novels as evidence of this. Dickens' trenchant portrayal of social situations and values could also have its origin in Smollett's presentation of society. Critics agree, similarly, on the influence of the melodramas he saw as a child and point to his use of type characters of good and evil, and extremely theatrical scenes in which confrontations occur in a flurry of histrionics, pathos, and, at times, violence. R. D. McMaster in "Dickens and the Horrific" points to the influence of tales of horror that Dickens had told to him as a child or read. He deals specifically with the influence of the Terrific Register (1824-25) which Dickens read as a boy. He writes:

The stories, varying in length from half a page to three pages, purport to be true and even to have a moral purpose, which is to show "God's revenge against murder." They do not, however, restrict themselves to the prosaic monotony of murder but range into torture, incest, the devouring of decayed human bodies, physical details of various horrible methods of execution,²⁴ and a variety of other such pleasant and profitable subjects.

In the Uncommercial Traveller Dickens recounts two of the horror stories told him by his nurse when he was a child. One of them, "Captain Murder," is a variation of the fairy tale of Bluebeard. Dickens' pre-occupation with punishment and violence, McMaster suggests, is already

discernible in his childhood reading.

Until recently, the study of the influence on Dickens' writing of the fairy tales he read as a child has been neglected. This is surprising when one considers the number of references to fairy tales throughout his work and his interest in the fairy tale as an educational tool and a literary genre revealed in the articles for Household Words. The peculiarly "Dickensian" stylistic traits discussed in Chapter II and considered by most critics as weaknesses when examined closely in the light of this interest become intelligible. His characters are more than just representations of good and evil borrowed from the melodrama. They are ogres, giants, dwarfs, fairy godmothers and godfathers, princes and princesses, and ill-treated children from the cast of the traditional fairy tales. His plots are built around the wish-fulfilment fantasies of Dick Whittington, Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, and, perhaps more importantly, his own childhood dreams after the move to London and reality: "I could not bear to think of myself -- beyond the reach of all such honourable emulation and success. The tears ran down my face. I felt as if my heart was rent. I prayed, when I went to bed that night, to be lifted out of the humiliation and neglect in which I was."²⁵

In Dickens' world actions are never final. Their implications grow like cracks in a mirror which has been struck by a stone. The characters are enmeshed in the implications of their own acts and those of others and also by their relationships, known or unknown, with other characters. Robert Morse writes,

Whoever has read one Dickens novel takes up a second with the happy confidence that the persons he meets there, however remote from each other they may at first appear, will all interlock in a tightening

pattern and each make his influence felt by the others, as in a folk tale the ragged old woman casually befriended by the third son is sure to reappear in his hour of need. And it is not surprising in this mythic England that its inhabitants should be related to each other with folk-tale coherence.²⁶

Dickens' characters also live in the traditional world of fairy tale -- a world in which inanimate objects are alive and at times frustrate the plans of their human counterparts.

The horror, violence, happy ending and moral which one finds in Dickens' work and which have been discussed in terms of literary conventions of his age (picaresque, melodramatic and sensational literature) can also be seen as props of the traditional fairy tale. The fresh and witty morals of Perrault's courtly fairy tales become conventional morals in English collections and translations. In the endings of Dickens' novels, as well as in those of the fairy tales, horror, violence, and the triumph of good are often united. J. R. R. Tolkien describes this ending as a "good catastrophe." It is the consolation, the "sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur."²⁷ The ending of Little Dorrit with its destruction of the evil Blandois in the ruins of the Clennam house after Mrs. Clennam's appeal to Amy, and that of A Tale of Two Cities with Darnay's miraculous escape from prison and the self-less death of Carton are examples of this kind of good catastrophe.

How does Dickens make use of these fairy-tale elements, modified in part by the literary conventions of the age, in his works? In "Prince Bull: A Fairy Tale" and "The Thousand and One Humbugs" Dickens was seen using the fairy tale as a vehicle for social satire. The fairy-tale characters and settings were, in fact, parodies of contemporary ones. In the late novels, beginning with Bleak House, fairy-

tale elements -- simple and grotesque characters, animated atmosphere, coincidence-filled plots, and unusually happy endings -- are fused with a realistic presentation of aspects of everyday life in his age. The world of fairy tale, in which everything is possible, in which good is rewarded and evil punished, is used as a contrast and ironic commentary on his own world and the whole of civilized life. The ogres and villains of fairy tale are seen in the novels as products of the age's emphasis on "hard facts." They are individuals in whom the imaginative faculty has been destroyed. Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen, a writer of literary fairy tales, defended his grotesque characters and actions thus (1870):

Certain tender-hearted people think that the domestic life of my Ogres, and their cruel dealings, with mankind, are too vividly and graphically described, so as to alarm and disgust the youthful mind. But what was I to do? . . . Seriously speaking, the Ogres and Dwarfs of Fairy literature are, in one point of view, intended to represent the evil of various sorts and degrees which surrounds mankind; and to describe them as otherwise than repulsive would be to destroy the whole force of the allegory.²⁸

Dickens would undoubtedly have agreed with this statement, if he had not assumed his normal stand as a realist writer in the face of criticism.

The heroes and heroines of the late novels are virtuous, like those in the fairy tales, and are tested by the "evil forces." At the moment of imminent catastrophe they are rewarded. Dickens, by emphasizing that often good can triumph only by means of a "miracle," the waving of a magic wand by a fairy godparent, comments on the spiritual deadness of his age as did Blake in "The Chimney Sweeper."

. . . That very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
 And he open'd the coffins and set them all free;
 Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
 And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.²⁹

The wish-fulfilment plot of the fairy tale thus becomes a vehicle for social criticism.

The surrealistic, highly imaginative atmosphere of fairy tale in Dickens' late novels becomes a representation of internal landscapes, those of the individual soul (Pip and the rank garden) and of the "societal soul" (the prison in Little Dorrit and the dustheaps and filthy river of Our Mutual Friend). The "animism" of the fairy tale is also transformed. Animism can be seen as an attempt by man to assimilate the world into his being by giving it a human face.³⁰ This process can be seen at work in Dickens' last novels. In a materialistic society objects are often valued more than human feelings and qualities. Dickens animates these objects and shows them taking control of situations. As a result of this change, man is seen becoming dehumanized and being relegated to the role of a thing. He is seen as no longer being a master of the material universe, but as its slave. Thus the human beings who run Bounderoy's factories are simply "hands." In Germinal Zola presents the mine as a bloodthirsty monster which devours the men who go into it. Materialism, like the genie in the lamp, is good when it is kept strictly under control, but once it gains the upper hand it becomes a hard master.

The atmosphere of the fairy tale serves as a means of social comment in another way. The enchanted garden in which everything is possible, associated with the garden of the imagination of the child, serves as a contrast to the materialistic wasteland of modern society. It is the goal towards which the good characters are travelling. It

is attained once a character has undergone a spiritual rebirth (for example, Arthur Clennam, Dr. Manette, Eugene Wrayburn, and so on). This garden can be an actual physical location or a metaphor for the state of mind of a particular character. Types of this garden are Pet Meagles' garden in the country into which Arthur Clennam first strays, Lucie's garden in Soho where her father returns to life, and Little Dorrit's spiritual garden which prompts Clennam to hear in her solitary voice, as she reads to him, all the voices of nature.

As Dickens' vision of the world darkens, he begins to question whether the fairy-tale transformation or miracle is possible. In Great Expectations the motives of fairy godparents are probed and the childhood garden becomes rank and overgrown. In Our Mutual Friend the fairy godmother is given another persona, that of the wolf in grandmother's clothing. The idyllic garden becomes more and more remote and almost completely inaccessible.

The writers of the literary fairy tales in mid-century, like Dickens, use the conventions and stylistic devices of the traditional fairy tales and also some of the devices of contemporary literature (for example, the moral, the taste for horror and punishment). But this is where the resemblance between the literary fairy tales and Dickens' mature work ends. Dickens transforms these devices into a unique literary manner which is the expression of a total vision and judgment of life. He fuses fantasy and social realism. The writers of the literary fairy tales may have social preoccupations, as did Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald and Christina Rossetti, but it is doubtful whether even one of these was able to approach the complexity and synthesis of realism and fantasy of Dickens.

3. Literary Antecedents of Dickens' "Fairy-Tale Vision"

Dickens wrote in "Frauds on the Fairies":

In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy Tales should be respected. Our English red tape is too magnificently red ever to be employed in the tying up of such trifles, but every one who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place in the sun.

This defense of "fancy" and the fairy tale in which it is embodied places Dickens in a direct line of descent from the Romantics who championed the imagination in a world ruled by Urizen. Blake envisioned a world dominated by "Satanic Mills," a world in which man has become a brick in the monolithic structure of society or a part in its gigantic engine (Pip's nightmare as he undergoes rebirth). Dickens, like Dostoevsky's underground man, lives in it.

The Romantic revolt against "mind-forged manacles" becomes in the industrial nineteenth century a revolt against a mechanistic, completely utilitarian view of life. For Dickens, the value of the individual is not determined by his role in the economic structure of society as the "dismal science" would have it. All the values which made up the individual's humanity -- his love and consideration for his fellow man, his love of nature, his hatred of tyranny and violence -- for Dickens, were included in the term "fancy" and in the fairy tale, just as in the Romantic revolt against the Age of Reason, these and other values, were embodied in the term "imagination."

Like Blake and Wordsworth, Dickens sees his ideal vision of life in the vision of the child.³¹ But he does not fall prey to the excessive worship of the child, of pre-existence, and of primitivism latent in the work of Blake and Wordsworth and expanded by other writers,

though there are elements of these theories in the passage in Oliver Twist describing Oliver's rebirth into a new life at the country home of the Maylies. Dickens writes:

The memories which peaceful country scenes call up, are not of this world, nor of its thoughts and hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us how to weave fresh garlands for the graves of those we loved; may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred; but beneath all this there lingers, in the least reflective mind, a vague and half-formed consciousness of having held such feelings long before, in some remote and distant time, which calls up solemn thoughts of distant times to come, and bends down pride and worldliness beneath it. (237)

But he rights the balance by parodying the insincere, conventional adoption of these through Mrs. Skewton in Dombey and Son and Mrs. Merdle in Little Dorrit. Both "priestesses" of society see themselves as primitives at heart, and would like to live surrounded by cows.

In the words of Mrs. Skewton,

'There is only one change, Mr. Dombey,. . . for which I really care, and that I fear I shall never be permitted to enjoy. People cannot spare one. But seclusion and contemplation are my what-his-name--'

'If you mean Paradise Mama, you had better say so, to render yourself intelligible,' said the younger lady.

'My dearest Edith,' returned Mrs. Skewton, 'you know that I am wholly dependent upon you for those odious names. I assure you, Mr. Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows -- and china.' (288-289)

Dickens further demolishes the notion of the "noble savage" in an essay in Household Words in which he describes the practices of the African Zulu Kaffir natives and the American Ojibbeway Indians.³² Through Mrs.

Skewton he also makes fun of pre-existence:

'You are fond of music, Mr. Dombey?'

'Eminently so,' was Mr. Dombey's answer.

'Yes. It's very nice,' said Cleopatra, looking at her cards.

'So much heart in it -- undeveloped recollections of a previous state of existence -- and all that -- which is so truly charming.' (296)

Unlike Blake and Wordsworth, Dickens associates the child's

innocent vision with the fairy tale. The garden in nature of Blake, Wordsworth, and the other Romantics becomes for Dickens the enchanted garden of fairy tale in which everything is possible, and the "garden of the imagination" which the fairy tale fosters in the child. This fairy-tale vision of life consists of the belief that "Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything; and 'Nothing is, but thinking makes it so.'" ³³ This was Dickens' own vision as a child, which enabled him to continue to exist in a world which had lost all meaning, all beauty, all hope. The desire for the fantastic in the real or fairy-tale vision of life continued in Dickens' adult life. He wrote to Mrs. Watson in December, 1857:

I am the modern embodiment of the old Enchanters whose Familiars tore them to pieces. I am weary of rest, and have no satisfaction but in fatigue. Realities and idealities are always comparing themselves before me, and I don't like the Realities except when they are unattainable -- then, I like them of all things. I wish I had been born in the days of Ogres, and Dragon-guarded Castles. I wish an Ogre with seven heads (and no particular evidence of brains in the whole of them) had taken the Princess whom I adore! -- to his stronghold on the top of a high series of mountains, and there tied her by the hair. Nothing could suit me half so well this day, as climbing after, sword in hand, and either winning her or being killed.-- There's a frame of mind for you, in 1857. ³⁴

This was written after the completion of Little Dorrit (June, 1857) in which Clennam, the hero, unlike another Dickens counterpart, David Copperfield, does not see himself in the role of the hero of the fairy tale -- the prince or the ill-treated boy who overcomes adversity and wins the princess. David is eager "to take [his] woodman's axe in [his] hand, and clear [his] own way through the forest of difficulty, by cutting down the trees until [he] came to Dora." (520) Clennam feels he is too old, as Dickens suspected he was himself at this time of marital crisis and infatuation with a young girl.

It is significant that in the next semi-autobiographical novel, Great Expectations, Dickens looks satirically at the "wish-fulfilment dream" of fairy tale -- the Cinderella or Dick Whittington plot. He has realized that this dream has little place in the world in which he lives. There is no escape from the world of social realities no matter how much the individual may desire it. With respect to his own life, no matter how idealized and pure Dickens saw his love for Ellen Ternan, society would see it as the last attempt of a middle-aged man to recapture youth and its idealism. To rephrase a thought from "Frauds on the Fairies," the world is too much with us, but the "friends of our childhood," the fairy tales or the "fairy-tale vision," can do nothing about it. "Wish fulfilment" or fairy tale can no longer offer an escape from the world (as it does temporarily in Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper," Kingsley's The Water-Babies, and as Dickens believes it can in "Frauds on the Fairies"). Fantasy only makes reality look worse rather than reconciling it. This is the vision particularly in Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend. Significantly, in Our Mutual Friend, the last complete novel, Dickens introduces another fairy-tale plot, besides the Cinderella plot, that of Little Red Ridinghood, which deals with appearance and reality. The plight of the hero is complicated when his fairy godmother turns out to be a wolf in grandmother's clothing. Society has succeeded in destroying even the last stronghold of man, the fairy tale and its vision of life. In the next chapter the vision of life embodied in each of the four last novels and its thematic and stylistic connection with the fairy tale will be examined.

CHAPTER IV

MATURE VISION AND TECHNIQUE

1. Little Dorrit

S'io credessi che mia risposta fosse
 a persona che mai tornasse al mondo
 questa fiamma staria senza più scosse.
 Ma per ciò che giammai di questo fondo
 non tornò vivo alcun, s'i odo il vero,
 senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Dante, The Inferno.

Although Dickens has used fairy-tale elements as thematic and structural devices in his earliest works, it is only in the last novels, beginning with Little Dorrit, that he achieves the peculiar blend of realism and fantasy which characterizes his mature "fairy-tale vision of life" and the judgment of society it implies. Dickens began to write Little Dorrit at the time of crisis resulting from the government's conduct of the Crimean War. He had treated this subject in "Prince Bull: A Fairy Tale" and in "The Thousand and One Humbugs," but it still troubled his mind. The government, abetted by the indifference of society, had committed too many blunders. Too many men had died on the field from lack of sufficient supplies for the event to be easily forgotten.¹ At home things were not much better. The poor were plagued by unemployment, get-rich-quick schemes were undermining the stability of the economy, and many suffered from the lack of adequate housing, sanitation and public health facilities. Dickens, by this time, had lost all faith in the government's ability or desire to do anything about these matters; in fact, the whole of society seemed resigned to "living and partly living."² In Little Dorrit Dickens creates a powerful symbol to

represent life in his society, and, perhaps, in all civilized societies. This is the symbol of the prison, associated with the underworld kingdom of Satan in Dante's The Divine Comedy.³ The symbol grows and pervades every line of the narrative and forces the reader to wonder how man can break out.

The story begins in a prison in Marseilles. Dickens immediately begins to create a feeling of enclosure, oppressive weight and suffocation. The sun beats mercilessly down on houses, streets, boats, hills, vines, and men. He then moves in and describes the prison at the heart of the city:

A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damps, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim. Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside; and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact, in one of the spice islands of the Indian ocean. (3)

The repetition and parallel constructions help create the feeling of oppressiveness. But it is not only the two criminals who are imprisoned. Travellers returning from the East have been kept in quarantine against the plague, and are just preparing to go off in their separate ways not realizing that their freedom is limited by walls more powerful than those of their physical prison, and that no matter how far they stray they will come together again.

The prison symbol expands next to include the whole of London. It is seen through the eyes of Arthur Clennam, the prodigal who hopes to return to his mother's home:

It was Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close and stale. Maddening church bells of all degrees of dissonance, sharp and flat, cracked and clear, fast and slow, made the brick-and-mortar echoes hideous. Melancholy streets in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls

of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondency. In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling, as if the Plague were in the city and the deadcarts were going round. . . . Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely, that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; albeit my lord, their county member, was amazed that they failed to sleep in company with their butcher's meat. Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. (28-29)

Arthur makes the connection between London's "underworld" and Satan's -- "Arthur opened the long low window, and looked out upon the old blasted and blackened forest of chimneys, and the old red glare in the sky which had seemed to him once upon a time but a nightly reflection of the fiery environment that was presented to his childish fancy in all directions, let it look where it would" (38). Just as he had focused on one prison in Marseilles, Dickens focuses on one prison in London, the Marshalsea, where the Dorrit family has been for more than twenty years. The Marshalsea is seen in demonic terms by the other focal character of the novel, Little Dorrit: "As she gently opened the window, and looked eastward down the prison yard, the spikes upon the wall were tipped with red, then made a sullen purple pattern on the sun as it came flaming up into the heavens. The spikes had never looked so sharp and cruel, nor the bars so heavy, nor the prison space so gloomy and contracted" (231). The red-tipped spikes of the Marshalsea resemble the flaming minarets of Dis, the capital city of Satan in Dante's hell.

But the prisons in the world of Little Dorrit are not solely physical. In fact, the most important prisons are non-material. They are psychological and spiritual prisons which the individual creates for himself or which he inherits when he is born into society. Mrs.

Clennam has created a prison for herself out of her harsh, inflexible religion. Dickens describes her Bible as being bound "in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dented ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves -- as if it, of all books! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse" (30). When her son asks her if their company has wronged anyone to whom they must make reparation, she cries: "Reparation! . . . Yes truly! It is easy for him to talk of reparation, fresh from journeying and junketing in foreign lands, and living a life of vanity and pleasure. But let him look at me, in prison, and in bonds here. I endure without murmuring, because it is appointed that I shall so make reparation for my sins" (50).

Miss Wade is another individual who has created a prison for herself as the title of the account of her life, "The History of a Self Tormenter," would imply. She has permitted herself to become obsessed by her illegitimate birth and her past as an unwanted child, and, as a result, she questions the motives of anyone who would attempt to do anything for her. But since the stigma attached to her birth is not self-inflicted, her prison can be seen as one created by society. From her portrayal one can also possibly infer that she cannot achieve happiness because she is a lesbian. Her relationships with her female friends and her peculiar power over Harriet suggest this. If this were the case, her prison would be a more subtle and therefore inescapable psychological one.

The prison with the strongest hold on the human mind is that resulting from the worship of wealth. Bar, Bishop, Physician, Treasury,

and the whole of society fawn at the feet of the golden idol, Merdle. Merdle himself is a prisoner of his wealth as he walks around his house feeling like a trespasser and appearing to put himself under arrest. The prison of aristocratic pretensions, in order to survive in the new industrial age, has had to make a reluctant marriage of convenience with wealth. The Barnacles and all their aristocratic but poor relations have thus attached themselves to the ship of state and every lucrative post in the empire. The result is the Circumlocution Office (the civil service) in which young, impoverished gentlemen learn the art of "how not to do it." The Circumlocution Office wears away the energy and will of the creative people of the country by its policy.

The prison which encompasses all others is "Society." Mrs. Merdle, who resembles her parrot in a gilded cage, states:

'My dear, it is not to be disputed for a moment . . . because Society has made up its mind on the subject, and there is nothing more to be said. If we were in a more primitive state, if we lived under roofs of leaves, and kept cows and sheep and creatures, instead of banker's accounts (which would be delicious; my dear, I am pastoral to a degree, by nature), well and good. But we don't live under leaves, and keep cows and sheep and creatures.' (391)

The ultimate arbiter of every human action, no matter how insignificant, is thus a mythical inexorable deity known as "Society."

The effect of imprisonment, whether physical, psychological or spiritual, on the personality of individuals living in such a society is the loss of will, the loss of the ability to act. John Stuart Mill described this as one of the negative products of the process of civilization.⁴ The individual living in a modern society has delegated most of the pleasant and unpleasant decisions he must make to his government and to the god of public opinion, and, as a result, with the passage of time, is less capable of making decisions for himself. If the individual

still possesses energy and will, he is encouraged by society to pursue wealth. But even in pursuing wealth, the individual must restrain himself from being too aggressive and purposeful. Mrs. Merdle tells her husband:

'I say . . . that you ought to make yourself fit for it [society] by being more degagé, and less preoccupied. There is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you as you do. . . .
 I don't expect you . . . to captivate people. I don't want you to take any trouble upon yourself, or to try to be fascinating. I simply request you to care about nothing -- or seem to care about nothing -- as everybody else does.' (396-397)

Dickens describes "prison fever" in Little Dorrit. An old inmate of the Marshalsea, a doctor, tells Dorrit after his arrival:

'It's freedom, sir, it's freedom! I have had to-day's practice at home and abroad, on a march, and aboard ship, and I'll tell you this: I don't know that I have ever pursued it under such quiet circumstances, as here this day. Elsewhere, people are restless, worried, hurried about, anxious respecting one thing, anxious respecting another. Nothing of the kind here, sir. We have done all that -- we know the worst of it; we have got to the bottom, we can't fall, and what have we found? Peace.' (63)

As Dostoevsky's underground man notes, man ultimately loves his prison, his putrid hole in the ground and would not know what to do if he were released.⁵ Dorrit succumbs and lives on the earnings of his youngest daughter and the offerings of other members of the College. The fact that Arthur Clennam, who has never been in prison, suffers from this fever indicates that it can be caused by psychological, social, and spiritual imprisonment as well as physical. Clennam tells Mr. Meagles:

'I have no will. That is to say,' he coloured a little, 'next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.' (20)

Clennam has described his life as that of a transported felon. What is to be done to break out man from the prisons created by his society and his own mind and cure his "prison fever?" This is the question Dickens asks and with difficulty answers in Little Dorrit.

In the fairy tale, when the hero or heroine is living in a state of misery he or she is freed by the intercession of a fairy god-mother, a person who can make wishes come true. In Little Dorrit Dickens employs this device ironically to free individuals living in society from their prisons. Although Mr. Meagles refers to himself and his wife as "practical people," their rescue of Harriet from the prison of "Institution" has elements of enchantment about it. Mr. Meagles, on proposing the move, tells his wife:

'Now, Mother, I have a proposition to make that I think you'll approve of. Let us take one of those same children to be a little maid to Pet. We are practical people. So if we should find her temper a little defective, or any of her ways a little wide of ours, we shall know what we have to take into account. We shall know what an immense deduction must be made from all the influences and experiences that have formed us -- no parents, no child - brother or sister, no individuality of home, no Glass Slipper, or Fairy Godmother. And that's the way we came by Tattycoram.' (18)

The "fairy" who breaks the Dorrits out of the prison in which the ogres of the Circumlocution Office have placed them is a more powerful individual; in the guise of Pancks, "the fortuneteller." She finally achieves her objective; in the words of "the pleasant young Barnacle" of the Circumlocution Office:

'This Mr. Dorrit (his name is Dorrit) had incurred a responsibility to us, ages before the fairy came out of the Bank and gave him his fortune, under a bond he had signed for the performance of a contract which was not at all performed. He was a partner in a house in some large way -- spirits, or buttons, or wine, or blacking, or oatmeal, or woollen, or pork, or hooks and eyes, or iron, or treacle, or shoes, or something or other that was wanted for the troops, or seamen, or somebody -- and the house burst, and we being among the creditors, detainers were lodged on the part of the Crown in a scientific manner,

and all the rest of it. When the fairy had appeared and he wanted to pay us off, Egad we had got into such an exemplary state of checking and counter-checking, signing and counter-signing, that it was six months before we knew how to take the money, or how to give a receipt for it.' (565)

The Dorrit family, like Cinderella, undergoes a transformation in appearance. Mr. Dorrit is described as "the dormant grub that had so long bided its time among the Collegians [and] had burst into a rare butterfly" (473). Little Dorrit sees their new existence as a dream from which they will awaken; their transformation, like that of Cinderella, will end with the striking of a clock and their palace in Venice will become the Marshalsea.

Little Dorrit's view of their escape from prison, resulting from the intervention of a "fairy," as a dream and therefore unreal is correct. In fact, neither Harriet nor the Dorrits have escaped from their prisons. They take their prisons with them, because the prisons are states of mind rather than physical locations. Dorrit, his son, Tip, and daughter, Fanny, are imprisoned by wealth and aristocratic pretensions long before they are imprisoned in the Marshalsea. As Fanny continually tells Little Dorrit, they were born outside and realize what life is about; in other words, they have been perverted by the values of society, whereas Little Dorrit, who is born in the prison, has not. Her spirit, because of her birth in the prison and other reasons, has not been trapped in the snares of society. Mrs. Merdle, the chief priestess of Society, means nothing to her. Little Dorrit is afraid when she sees the "prison shadow" around her father even in his freedom:

A faint misgiving, which had hung about her since their accession to fortune, that even now she could never see him as he used to be before

the prison days, had gradually begun to assume form in her mind. She felt that, in what he had just now said to her, and in his whole bearing toward her there was the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall. (478)

Little Dorrit's desire to see her father the way he was before he entered the Marshalsea can never be fulfilled because he has always been a prisoner; he simply went from one kind of imprisonment to another. The Marshalsea is simply a physical embodiment of his spiritual imprisonment, and is, in turn, replaced temporarily by a fairy-tale castle whose facade finally crumbles to reveal the Marshalsea walls.

The fairy-tale transformation, Dickens discovers, can no longer occur in the society in which he lives. The shades of the prison-house lie too strongly on man's spirit, the world's slow stain has seeped too deeply to be removed by surface cleaning.

Through the person of Little Dorrit, the prison child who paradoxically is the only free person in society, the only person not imprisoned by the "machinery," as Matthew Arnold would put it, of religion, wealth, aristocracy, and government, Dickens presents another form of "transformation" or rebirth. Little Dorrit's birth and development offer a contrast to those of the other characters. As a child of eight, shut in the prison, she dreams of fields she has never seen and flowers she has never smelled. She asks her friend the turnkey whether her father has seen the fields and whether he misses them. The turnkey tells her that he does not miss them (71). Her father, like the majority of mankind, has preferred the artificial gardens of society to the real ones in nature. After this episode a number of excursions to gardens and fields begin. Unlike her family, throughout her stay in prison she not only sees the flame-tipped spikes but also thinks "of the sunrise on rolling rivers, of the sunrise on

wide seas, of the sunrise on rich landscapes, of the sunrise on great forests where the birds were waking and the trees were rustling" (231). She is the only character in the book who "[keeps] with [her] pure hands a garden in the stony ways of this world, wherein it were better for all the children of Adam that they should often sun themselves, simple and trustful and not worldly-wise" (HT, 197). She possesses the vision fostered by the fairy tale which Dickens describes in "Frauds on the Fairies," when he writes:

Forbearance, courtesy, consideration for the poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, the love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force -- many such good things have been first nourished in the child's heart by this powerful aid. It has greatly helped to keep us, in some sense, ever young, by preserving through our worldly ways one slender track not overgrown with weeds, where we may walk with children, sharing their delights.⁶

This vision permits her to assign a true value to the material aspirations of her family and her society. Little Dorrit sees her own life in terms of fairy tale as the story about the "little woman" which she tells Maggie reveals. When John Chivery plans his future life with her, he thinks of transforming the prison into an "Arbour" (212). Her consideration for the Plornishes enables them to possess their "pastoral haven" (574) in Bleeding Heart Yard. The devil incarnate's (Rigaud's) hold on Mrs. Clennam is released after her appeal to Little Dorrit.

Clennam's upbringing offers a contrast to that of Little Dorrit. Her "fancy" flourished in her physical prison; Clennam's dies in the psychological and spiritual prison of his mother: "To review his life, was like descending a green tree in fruit and flower, and seeing all the branches wither and drop off one by one, as he came towards them" (165). But all finer feelings are not destroyed in Arthur, because he

is not his mother's son. He is a love-child born of the union between a poor singer and a young man oppressed and imprisoned by a harsh religious and business ethic. Arthur, as a result, is incapable of accepting the values of society, of becoming imprisoned by them.

He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had, deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honourable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this has rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity. (165)

Clennam feels the guilt which the remainder of his society refuses to take upon itself, the guilt resulting from the warping of the minds and bodies of men by the worship of inhuman economic, political, social and religious creeds.

Clennam unconsciously seeks the garden of childhood, the garden of the imagination fostered by the fairy tales of which he has been deprived. He ventures first into Pet's garden, but it already belongs to someone else. Also, if his courtship of Pet had succeeded, the transformation would have come too easily and would have resembled the Cinderella, magic wand transformation of the Dorrit family and Harriet, which has proved unsuccessful. Clennam must turn to the "child," the "good fairy" (284), and learn how to live under her instruction, just as little Tom learns from the fairies Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby in Kingsley's The Water-Babies.

As he sits in his physical prison after his material ruin, Clennam smells flowers.

Dozing and dreaming, without the power of reckoning time, so that a minute might have been an hour and an hour a minute, some abiding impression of a garden stole over him -- a garden of flowers, with a damp warm wind gently stirring their scents. (775)

Little Dorrit has penetrated into his imprisonment, physical and psychological: 'With her hands laid on his breast to keep him in his chair and with her knees upon the floor at his feet, and with her lips raised up to kiss him, and with her tears dropping on him as the rain from Heaven had dropped upon the flowers, Little Dorrit, a living presence, called him by his name' (756). The tears of a woman who has retained the innocent childhood vision cause the garden of his fancy to bloom again. In her voice as she reads to him he hears all the voices of nature. He becomes a child again:

At no Mother's knee but hers, had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises, on playful fancies, on the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination; on the oaks of retreat from blighting winds, that have the germs of their strong roots in nursery acorns. But in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things, and echoes of every merciful and loving whisper that had ever stolen to him in his life. (815)

Man cannot break out of the prison of society, the city of hell, by means of the waving of a magic wand. He must undergo a change of heart; he must free himself from the psychological, spiritual and social prisons which restrict his spirit before he can cope with the physical prison which surrounds him, in orthodox Christian terms, the world. He can do this only by returning to the garden of the imagination symbolized by the fairy tale in childhood.

2. A Tale of Two Cities

'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?'
T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land.

In his review of Planche's translation of the fairy tales of the Countess D'Aulney Dickens noted that her princes and princesses were always shut up in towers and had to be released by their fairy guardians.⁷

In Little Dorrit Dickens is seen using the symbol of the prison to represent life in a materialistic, utilitarian, completely non-imaginative society. The fairy-tale motif of escape from prison through the intercession of fairy godparents is tested in this society and found to be wanting. In A Tale of Two Cities Dickens extends the scope of his symbol to include life in all civilized society, in both the old and new regimes. A supposedly liberal revolutionary regime is shown becoming as totalitarian as the absolute monarchy it replaced. Closely associated with the prison as a symbol of life in society is the tomb, an archetypally more permanent form of imprisonment. Dickens had suggested this connection in Little Dorrit: "Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside; and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact, in one of the spice islands of the Indian ocean" (3).

The story begins with a dark journey "to dig some one out of a grave" (12). Jarvis Lorry, while riding in the Dover coach, conducts a conversation with a spectre and inquires whether or not he wants to be recalled to life. At times the answer is yes, and at times, no:

After such imaginary discourse, the passenger in his fancy would dig, and dig, dig -- now, with a spade, now with a great key, now with his hands -- to dig this wretched creature out. Got out at last, with earth hanging about his face and hair, he would suddenly fall away to dust. The passenger would then start to himself, and lower the window, to get the reality of mist and rain on his cheek. (13)

Mr. Lorry's morbid state of mind is shared by Miss Manette's room in the hotel:

It was a large, dark room, furnished in a funereal manner with black horsehair, and loaded with heavy dark tables. These had been oiled and oiled, until the two tall candles on the table in the middle of the room were gloomily reflected on every leaf; as if they were buried, in deep graves of black mahogany, and no light to speak of could be expected from them until they were dug out. (18)

The world into which Lorry penetrates is a dead world. Everything is skeletal or entombed. The corpse which he is preparing to dig up is a victim of the arbitrary, unjust powers of an aristocratic social order. He had been imprisoned for eighteen years in the Bastille -- both a prison and a tomb -- the symbol of the power over life and death exercised by that order. His imprisonment has reduced the doctor to the state of a skeleton who remains alive only because he has a task to complete; he must finish the shoes he is making. All his humanity has been slowly worn out of him and when he is asked his name, he can only answer, "One Hundred and Five, North Tower" (40).

But Doctor Manette is not the only victim of the aristocratic social order. In fact, his fate, though pathetic, is of little importance in the historical evaluation of individual lives. It is the fate of the Jacquerie which will determine history, of the numerous scarecrows who populate the cities and towns of France. Everything these people possess has been taken and ground in the aristocratic mill:

The mill which had worked them down, was the mill that grinds young people old; the children had ancient faces and grave voices; and upon them, and upon the grown faces, and ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh, was the sign, Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere. Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon poles and lines; Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood that the man sawed off; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street that had no offal, among its refuse, of anything to eat. (28-29).

If the regime decided that nothing more could be gotten out of an individual, it could amuse itself by taking his life. The patrician habit of driving carriages at breakneck speeds through narrow streets and watching the vulgar jump was this kind of game (103). The individual

could choose between life at subsistence level or captivity or death in prison. France is therefore a land occupied by living skeletons; it is a mass prison, and, at the same time, a mass tomb. Darnay, speaking of his inheritance and of France in general tells his Uncle: "To the eye it is fair enough, here; but seen in its integrity, under the sky, and by the daylight, it is a crumbling tower of waste, mismanagement, extortion, debt, mortgage, oppression, hunger, nakedness, and suffering" (118). The shadow of the Bastille is cast over the whole of France, because France itself is the Bastille, a whited sepulchre.

What is true of France, is also true of England, the England of the last part of the eighteenth century and particularly that of the mid-nineteenth century. England too is "a crumbling tower of waste, mismanagement, extortion, debt, mortgage, oppression, hunger, nakedness and suffering," as Little Dorrit has shown. Tellson's Bank by Temple Bar in 1780 is described as a tomb. Dickens writes:

But indeed, at that time putting to death was a recipe much in vogue with all trades and professions, and not least of all with Tellson's. Death is Nature's remedy for all things, and why not Legislation's? Accordingly, the forger was put to Death; the coiner of a bad shilling was put to Death; the sounders of three-fourths of the notes in the whole gamut of Crime were put to Death. Not that it did the least good in the way of prevention -- it might almost have been worth remarking that the fact was exactly the reverse -- but, it cleared off (as to this world) the trouble of each particular case, and left nothing else connected with it to be looked after. (50)

This reliance on death to solve social problems was not solely a characteristic of the late eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Ricardo and Malthus saw the problems of the workers, the surplus part of the population, being solved by disease, death, and vice. England, like France, is thus also a land of the dead.

Dickens keeps emphasizing that the French Revolution was a long time in the making. The aristocracy reaps as it has sown. The frightful

mask of St. Antoine took hundreds of years to beat into shape. Its fierceness increased as the appearance of the aristocrats became more and more artificial; as "the leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature in attendance upon Monseigneur" (101); as the number of men in government and the professions who knew nothing about their occupations increased (100). The aristocrats are imprisoned spiritually by their wealth as much as the remainder of the citizens by their poverty:

The exquisite gentlemen of the finest breeding wore little pendent trinkets that chinked as they languidly moved; these golden fetters rang like precious little bells; and what with that ringing, and with the rustle of silk and brocade and fine linen, there was a flutter in the air that fanned Saint Antoine and his devouring hunger far away. (101)

This unnatural state of affairs, the living of one class on the sweat and blood of another, cannot last. The storm finally breaks, the pressure beneath the surface of the earth reaches a critical point and the earth shakes.

Throughout his work Dickens reveals the fear that, if social evils are not corrected, Victorian government will be faced with chaos, perhaps even a revolution like that in France. He wrote to Miss Coutts in May, 1855:

Take my knowledge of the state of things in this distracted land for what it may be worth a dozen years hence. The people will not bear for any length of time what they bear now. I see it clearly written in every truthful indication that I am capable of discerning anywhere. And I want to interpose something between them and their wrath.⁸

He compares the state of mind of the nation to "the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution." In Little Dorrit the fear is expressed that the increasing number of "Barnacles" attached to the ship of state may cause it to sink, and that more swindles like that of Merdle will undermine the stability of the economy.

These fears become more and more oppressive for Dickens until they culminate in the image of rats insidiously chewing away at the foundation of society in Our Mutual Friend. This same image is used to describe conditions in France just prior to the Revolution:

The whole Fancy Ball in a bright continuous flow, came whirling by. The rats had crept out of their holes to look on, and they remained looking on for hours; soldiers and police often passing between them and the spectacle, and making a barrier behind which they slunk, and through which they peeped. (105)

The English upper classes, the aristocracy of birth and wealth, like the French aristocracy, Dickens felt, do not heed the danger signals. Like the flies in Madame Defarge's shop, they continue to swarm around the glass filled with sugared poison.

In A Tale of Two Cities Dickens is faced with the problem of how to present artistically an evil which distorts both the bodies and minds of men living in society. In Hard Times and Little Dorrit the representatives of the new mechanical, materialistic, utilitarian order are presented as inanimate objects to show their inhumanity. In A Tale of Two Cities men are presented as beasts. They have lost their humanity as the result of a strange enchantment. Dickens describes the Marquis, the embodiment of the evil of the old order, thus:

The valet come and gone, Monsieur the Marquis walked to and fro in his loose chamber-robe, to prepare himself gently for sleep, that hot still night. Rustling about the room, his softly-slippered feet making no noise on the floor, he moved like a refined tiger: -- looked like some enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked sort, in story, whose periodical change into tiger form was either just going off, or just coming on. (119)

The Marquis' bestiality gives him a taste for human blood -- "You dogs!" said the Marquis, but smoothly, and with an unchanged front, except as to the spots on his nose: "I would ride over any of you very willingly, and exterminate you from the earth" (105).

But it is not solely the representatives of the old unjust order that have been transformed into beasts. The inhabitants of Saint Antoine, who have greedily drunk up the wine spilled before the shop of Defarge, have a "tigerish smear about the mouth" (28). They are described as hunted beasts with the thought of turning at bay. The transformation is complete at the storming of the Bastille. Lucie, in her enchanted garden, hears "the footsteps of a people, tumultuous under a red flag and with their country declared in danger, changed into wild beasts, by terrible enchantment long persisted in" (223). Dickens describes France's terrible enchantment:

Six tumbrils roll along the streets. Change these back again to what they were, thou powerful enchanter, Time, and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles, the toilettes of flaring Jezebels, the churches that are not my father's house but dens of thieves, the huts of millions of starving peasants! No; the great magician who majestically works out the appointed order of the Creator, never reverses his transformations. 'If thou be changed into this shape by the will of God,' say the seers to the enchanted, in the wise Arabian stories, 'then remain so! But, if thou wear this form through mere passing conjuration then resume thy former aspect!' Changeless and hopeless, the tumbrils roll along. (353)

The bestiality of the mob, its lust for blood and complete heedlessness of the value of life, produces the horror of the Reign of Terror.

Dickens also stresses the inhumanity of characters by presenting them as ogres. Thus the taste for blood of the refined ladies and gentlemen of the court, demonstrated by the execution of Damiens, is described as "ogreish." The mob also is ogreish. Jacques Three thirsts for blood. The men and women around the grindstone in the court-yard of Tellson's Bank with their fierce disguises and bloody clothing are ogres. To repeat the words of Knatchbull-Hugessen, "Seriously speaking, the Ogres and Dwarfs of Fairy literature are, in one point of view, intended to represent the evil of various sorts and degrees which surrounds mankind."

Dickens' fairy-tale vision has thus provided him again with an objective correlative for social evil.

This is not the sole use that Dickens makes of fairy-tale elements in A Tale of Two Cities. As was pointed out above, when the escape is being made from Paris, the countryside is animated and pursues the fleeing coach: "The wind is rushing after us, and the clouds are flying after us, and the moon is plunging after us; but, so far we are pursued by nothing else." (340) But fairy-tale elements, as in Little Dorrit, have a more important function. Dr. Manette, while awaiting news of Darnay's fate, tells his granddaughter "a story of a great Fairy who had opened a prison-wall and let out a captive who had once done the Fairy service" (277). The "recalled to life" theme is this kind of fairy-tale escape. But, as was shown in Little Dorrit, this escape is not a solution to the problems of man living in society. Similarly, Dr. Manette, freed from the prison of the old order, has to contend with the prisons of the new order. These prisons succeed again in breaking his spirit. His recall to life is a recall to a death-in-life, and, in a sense, resembles the limited "resurrections" performed by Jerry. The Doctor moves from one prison, the Bastille, to another, La Force; from one tomb to another. His corpse "blooms" temporarily in his daughter's Soho garden and then dies again.

As in Little Dorrit the prison of society, the whited sepulchre, is contrasted with the garden of the imagination, associated by Dickens with the fairy tale. Lucie creates this kind of garden for her father, as Little Dorrit does for Clennam. When Darnay first sees her at his trial he imagines a garden:

Standing, as it were, apart with her on the edge of his grave, not all the staring curiosity that looked on, could, for the moment, nerve him

to remain quite still. His hurried right hand parcelled out the herbs before him into imaginary beds of flowers in a garden: and his efforts to control and steady his breathing shook the lips from which the colour rushed to his heart. (65)

Her presence transforms the herbs meant as a protection against disease and therefore a symbol of the deadliness of the prison into a symbol of life and love. She has the same effect on the purposeless Carton:

Waste forces within him, and a desert all around, this man stood still on his way across a silent terrace, and saw for a moment, lying in the wilderness before him, a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and perseverance. In the fair city of this vision, there were airy galleries from which fruits of life hung ripening, waters of Hope that sparkled in his sight. A moment, and it was gone. (85)

At the corner in Soho Lucie creates a "harbour from the raging streets" (87). Flowers bloom in the garden and trees rustle in the wind. At the back of the garden church-organs are made, silver is chased and a giant with a golden arm beats gold. Lucie weaves this gold into a thread which binds everyone around her into an enchanted circle safe from the evil of the world (200). Only the footsteps of people in the outside world can be heard, and, at times, these threaten. So long as Darnay remains in his wife's magic garden he is safe. Once he leaves, his wife is powerless to help him directly. But he must leave the garden, because he had promised his mother that he would make reparations for the wrongs of the family. Though the innocence and goodness of the childhood vision of reality thus appears to be helpless in the face of revolutionary evil, it is not completely so. It is the "inspiration" of Lucie, her awakening of the garden of childhood within him, that enables Carton to perform the greatest act of his life. It is the love of Lucie which gives Miss Pross the strength to defeat the evil Madam Defarge.

In A Tale of Two Cities Dickens makes clear his belief that

reform in society cannot come about through revolutionary means. A revolution simply involves the overthrow of the hated institutions of the old regime. Since the revolutionaries are victims of the injustices of that regime and have been shaped by it, they are incapable of creating a completely new unprejudiced order. This is shown by the fact that the monarchical prison, the Bastille, is replaced by the citizens' prison, La Force. In Little Dorrit Dickens presented individual psychological and spiritual rebirth as a possible answer to social problems. This solution is tested in A Tale and found inadequate. Dickens is faced with the paradox that societal reform can come about only as a result of individual reform, but, at the same time, individual reform can come about only in a society in which the individual personality is permitted to develop free from imprisoning ideas (economic, political, religious, or otherwise), in other words, an already reformed society. Lucie's goodness has no effect on the distorted, warped spirits of Madame, the Vengeance and Jacques Three, who plot her death and that of her child. She cannot create a garden for her loved ones in France, a country completely dead to the finer feelings of humanity. She must leave this dead land and try to set her own land in order.

The only hope for France comes from the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection. Carton remembers the words of Christ just before he goes to his Christ-like death of self-sacrifice and atonement: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (299). Dickens in A Tale, as in Little Dorrit, finally sees man's imprisonment in society (English and French, past and present), his burial alive, in orthodox Christian terms. The

world is the prison of the soul, its grave. As Sir Thomas Browne observes in Section XI of the Religio Medici, "For the world, I count it not an Inn, but an Hospital; and a place not to live, but to die in." Dickens makes this view clear when he describes the scene which Carton sees the night before his death by the guillotine, which has replaced the cross in France:

The night wore out, and, as he stood upon the bridge listening to the water as it splashed the river-walls of the Island of Paris, where the picturesque confusion of houses and cathedral shone bright in the light of the moon, the day came coldly, looking like a dead face out of the sky. Then, the night, with the moon and the stars, turned pale and died, and for a little while it seemed as if Creation were delivered over to Death's dominion.

But, the glorious sun, rising, seemed to strike those words, that burden of the night, straight and warm to his heart in its long bright rays. And looking along them, with reverently shaded eyes, a bridge of light appeared to span the air between him and the sun, while the river sparkled under it. (299)

There is no escape for man from the prison of the world, from the dead land, except through the workings of divine grace. Fortunate are the few who have retained the vision of the childhood garden into which they can escape when the world becomes too much for them. The corpse planted in the garden may bloom temporarily but it must die, for according to the Christian vision expressed in the novel, only in death is there life.

3. Great Expectations

Great Expectations can be seen as an ironic rewriting of the Cinderella story incorporating the social and economic values of mid-nineteenth century England. Cinderella-Pip's great expectations are seen being fulfilled through the mysterious workings of a fairy godmother. But instead of stopping the tale there and stating that everyone lived happily ever after, Dickens traces the effect of this fairy-tale trans-

formation on his hero; he traces "Cinderella's" life in Society as he had done in Little Dorrit with the Dorrit family. In doing this, he places the wish-fulfilling fairy-tale world in ironic opposition with Pip's real world, which is the prison-world of Little Dorrit and the dead land of A Tale of Two Cities. As noted in Little Dorrit, imprisonment can be both physical and psychological. The imprisonment of Pip's spirit by aspirations for success completely sanctioned by his society is externalized and represented by his association with the criminal world and its prison, Newgate, and by having the fulfillment of his expectations arise out of that world. The landscape of his soul is the waste marshland in which we first meet him, the dead house with its rank garden, and, finally, the flourishing but deadly "gardens" of Newgate, tended by Wemmick and Jaggers. If Dickens had had any doubts in his mind as to the possible success of fairy tale solutions of real problems, there are none after Great Expectations. The real world inverts and perverts the fairy-tale world, or is, in fact, an upside down version of that world.

The fairy-tale pattern of Pip's fate emerges with the presentation of his childhood.⁹ His parents died before he became conscious of them and his sister has "brought him up by hand," the harshest possible of upbringings. He grows up with a keen sense of injustice:

My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice. . . . Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me. I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand, gave her no right to bring me up by jerks. Through all my punishments, disgraces, fasts and vigils, and other penitential performances, I had nursed this assurance. (57-58)

His discontent crystalizes when he meets Estella. Her judgment of him as "a common labouring-boy" and her scorn complete his disenchantment with his life. Everything is common and coarse, including his childhood dream of becoming apprenticed to Joe. In a moment of utter despair he tells Biddy that he wants to be a gentleman on Estella's account (122). The fairy-tale situation of the unjustly treated and scorned child who becomes hero is thus established. Pip is now an ideal subject for a fairy godmother's "transformation" act.

The fairy godmother comes in the guise of Miss Havisham to free the hero from his bondage, to fulfil his wish: 'My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale' (130). Pip himself makes the connection between his fortune and the fairy tale when he goes to Satis House in his new "gentleman's" clothes to say good-bye: "'This is a gay figure, Pip,' said she, making her crutch stick play round me, as if she, the fairy godmother who had changed me, were bestowing the finishing gift" (149). Pip, without thought to the past happiness he owes to Joe, is ready to live the fairy tale through to its end. He will buy everything it takes to become a gentleman -- clothing, manners, education -- and, at the same time, dream of his "fairy godmother's" plans for him:

She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin -- in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. (219)

Pip has thus assigned the roles in the play: Miss Havisham is the fairy godmother; Estella is the Princess in the sleeping wood; he himself is the knight or prince who will awaken the realm from its death-like sleep; Herbert will be his confidant and will be suitably rewarded for his services. This is very neat plotting, but it does not provide roles for all the cast, an indication that perhaps there is something wrong with Pip's vision of life.

Pip's world is inverted in the graveyard when the convict turns him upside down to check his pockets for food. He himself sees this as the determining moment of his life, the first moment of consciousness, of identity. But the "shades of the prison-house" have begun to close round him before this time. Although he later speaks of the happy times he had with Joe, when the reader first meets him he is in a graveyard surrounded by marshes and beyond by a leaden sea. His childhood garden of the imagination thus appears to have been a graveyard in a marsh. It is no wonder that when he is faced with the corpse-like owner of Satis House dressed in her faded satins, laces and silks, her decaying manor and her rank garden, he attributes to them the rich, living color of fairy tale. Perhaps Satis House and Miss Havisham are the only fitting symbol for his "great expectations" and those of his whole society.

Throughout the novel Dickens has Pip, the narrator, describe and interpret what he sees and does, and, in doing this, reveal the narrowness of his vision. Thus when Pip sees the fairy-tale masks of characters, the reader sees these and the reality beneath. Miss Havisham, on the surface, is thus fairy godmother with liberal gifts to bestow, but underneath, as her name suggests (Hav-i-sham or "Have

a-sham"), she possesses nothing because she is dead. Her house, Satis House, represents a false plenty. She can give nothing but misery and emotional death, which are negations. As a child Pip has the sensation that he and Estella may begin to decay in the airless, sunless rooms. Later, Pip speaks of her distorting Estella with her "wasting hands" (297). She is a vengeful, embittered ghost who enjoys watching her relatives fight like vultures over her almost dead carcass. She has fashioned Estella to exact revenge on mankind for her betrayal. Pip can see her as she really is, only after he has begun to accept his real benefactor, Magwitch. He can then forgive her, without judging her:

I knew not how to answer or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker, I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world? (377-378)

Estella, the "star," the Princess, the source of Pip's aspirations, also possesses two faces, one of them a fairy-tale mask and the other a real face. Herbert sees her clearly and tries to make Pip detach himself from her by pointing to her upbringing under Miss Havisham. Estella herself tells him that she has no heart -- no sentiments or fancies. She describes her inability to love:

'I begin to think,' said Estella, in a musing way, after another moment of calm wonder, 'that I almost understand how this comes about. If you had brought up your adopted daughter wholly in the dark confinement of these rooms, and had never let her know that there was such a thing as

the daylight by which she has never once seen your face -- if you had done that, and then, for a purpose, had wanted her to understand the daylight and know all about it, you would have been disappointed and angry?' (291)

Estella is another Louisa Gradgrind. Pip can never accept the fact that she is incapable of loving because, as he states, "It is not in Nature" (343). But her upbringing has gone contrary to nature. The rank garden also is a symbol of her childhood garden of the imagination destroyed by the world of experience. Ultimately, Pip is able to see that she is part of the little good that is in him but also a part of the evil: "Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boyhood -- from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe" (223).

Pip sees his own role as that of the prince in fairy tale, but, like the other fairy-tale characters, he has a real, uglier face beneath his mask. In order to act his role of prince, he rejects Joe and Biddy and all the values that they embody. He chases the mirage of his false ambitions across the desert of contemporary society and leaves behind the reality of honest, honorable, hard work represented by Joe. He refuses to heed Joe's advice -- "If you can't get to be uncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked" (66). He accepts the attentions of fawning Pumblechook, who unlike his true friends, will tell him the lie that his expectations were deserved. He scorns the only true gentleman in his society, Joe, in order to associate with the "gentlemen" of "great expectations" produced wholesale in his age, the Finches of the Grove. The ambitions of Orlick, to find a position and to win Biddy, appear criminal to Pip, but he refuses to see his own ambitions in this light. He can conceive of Orlick's allying himself with criminals to achieve his ends, but refuses to see

himself doing the same thing, although his own connection with criminals begins at a very early age. He refuses to see criminals as human beings with aspirations like his own and persists in seeing them as vicious animals to be avoided. He can only begin to question the values of society that he has accepted as a result of Estella's appearance in his life after he has discovered the true source of his expectations.

The distortion of fairy-tale types and fairy-tale plot presented above, for Dickens, is the inevitable mode of portrayal of life in a society which worships wealth and position without heed to their source. As was stated previously, Pip's world is that of Little Dorrit and A Tale of Two Cities (although the direct social criticism of these novels is absent since the narrator himself is imprisoned by his society's values). The imagery of entombment and death of A Tale of Two Cities is found at the beginning of the novel. Pip is seen sitting in a graveyard in the marshes. His heritage consists of the tablets marking the graves of his parents and his brothers. The next stage in his development leads him to Miss Havisham's dead house in which she is buried alive. Pip notes, "Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud" (55). Pip's next move takes him to Jaggers' office with its "high-backed chair . . . of deadly black horse-hair, with rows of brass nails round it, like a coffin" and its horrible death masks. Close by is Smithfield with its animal filth, fat, blood, and foam and also Newgate with the human counterparts of these. Pip's lodgings at Barnard's Inn are a part of Clennam's inferno. The courtyard is described by Pip as "a flat bury-

ing-ground." Pip imagines the inhabitants of the "Inn" committing suicide and being buried under the gravel of the court. Joe, on his first visit to Barnard's Inn, comments that he would not keep a pig there, if he wanted it to "fatten wholesome" (209). The death imagery culminates in the lime pits of the marshes which leave no rags or bones as evidence.

Prisons and criminality also appear at the beginning of the novel and throw their shadow on almost every character. The convict comes upon Pip in the graveyard in the marshes. After their brief exchange of words he appears to hook himself up on the gibbet at the edge of the river, like the pirate of old who had hung there. After his rise in fortune, Pip himself wonders at his association with crime.

While waiting for Estella, Pip thinks:

How strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime; that, in my childhood out on our lonely marshes on a winter evening I should have first encountered it; that, it should have reappeared on two occasions, starting out like a stain that was faded but not gone; that, it should in this new way pervade my fortune and advancement. While my mind was thus engaged, I thought of the beautiful young Estella, proud and refined, coming towards me, and I thought with absolute abhorrence of the contrast between the jail and her. I wished that Wemmick had not met me, or that I had not yielded to him and gone with him, so that, of all days in the year on this day, I might not have had Newgate in my breath and on my clothes. I beat the prison dust off my feet as I sauntered to and fro, and I shook it out of my dress, and I exhaled its air from my lungs. (249-250)

But the prison dust is not confined to Newgate, for there are probably more prisoners outside than within its walls, individuals imprisoned by their acceptance of the false values of society (in Great Expectations, specifically, the idea of a gentility based on "great expectations"), or their own distorted consciousnesses. Pip, while thinking back on his linking his fate with Estella, states:

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (67)

This is the psychological imprisonment presented in Little Dorrit.

Almost every character in the novel inhabits this kind of prison.

But the prisons and criminality of Great Expectations are not merely a symbol of the state of mind fostered by society, as in Little Dorrit. They are also a commentary on the economic and social ethics of the present and near past. Magwitch tells Pip that he was forced into a life of crime in order to eat after he was abandoned by his parents. Jaggers, in telling Pip why he gave Estella to Miss Havisham, substantiates Magwitch's statement:

'Put the case that he [a lawyer] lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come to his net -- to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow.' (391)

This is not merely poetic license on Dickens' part. Mayhew, in his London Labour and the London Poor, attacks the complete lack of knowledge of society in general about conditions in "the undiscovered country of the poor." He writes in a preface:

My earnest hope is that the book may serve to give the rich a more intimate knowledge of the sufferings, and the frequent heroism under those sufferings, of the poor -- that it may teach those who are beyond temptation to look with charity on the frailties of their less fortunate brethren -- and cause those who are in "high places," and those of whom much is expected, to bestir themselves to improve the condition of a class of people whose misery, ignorance, and vice, amidst all the immense wealth and great knowledge of "the first city

in the world," is to say the very least, a national disgrace to us.¹⁰

Pip adopts an attitude of revulsion towards criminals and condescension towards the poor of his society similar to Estella's.

Magwitch is used by a gentleman thief and when both are tried, the latter's status as "gentleman" results in a less severe penalty. Pip also can be said to use Magwitch by living parasitically on his hard-earned wealth. By having Pip's great expectations arise from a criminal source and by having the upholders of the values of society have criminal connections (Estella is the daughter of Magwitch and a murderess; Miss Havisham was engaged to Compeyson, the gentleman thief) Dickens implicates the whole of society in criminality. Pip's and his society's acceptance of the notion of great expectations, of unearned wealth creating gentility, is criminal. The wealthy in society -- the Barnacles, the Merdles, the Gowans -- are living parasitically on the earnings of a hard-worked minority. Such a society is a prison, a tomb, from which the individual must break out.

Pip's fairy-tale transformation appears to release him from one kind of imprisonment only to lead him into another more terrible one. Pip only becomes conscious of his spiritual imprisonment in a dream during his illness after the death of Magwitch. Magwitch's name is Abel, and he is killed by his Cain-like society. The poor and the criminal are scapegoats in a completely materialist society. Dickens cannot consent to this. In his dream, Pip expresses an intense desire to be free:

I confounded impossible existences with my own identity; that I was a brick in the house wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off. (438)

He refuses to become a brick in the massive structure of society (Coketown in Hard Times is completely made of bricks), a part of its huge engine. He refuses to become an inanimate object.

Pip's dream epitomizes the plight of man in a modern industrial society, the society presented in Hard Times and to a lesser extent in Little Dorrit. Great Expectations is not simply a bildungs roman, the story of Pip's development. It must be read in the context of the late novels with their social preoccupations. Pip's connection with criminality, the criminal source of his "expectations," when placed in this context, has far-reaching implications for the whole of society and civilization.

Pip can only free himself from his imprisonment in the values of society when he has accepted Magwitch as the source of his expectations. He can do this only after he has undergone a trial by fire, faced immediate death at the hands of Orlick, and reviewed the events of his life. After this he can say of Magwitch:

For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (423)

By this time the types of evil in society have been destroyed by the deaths of Compeyson, Magwitch, and Miss Havisham. Estella has begun her trial by suffering and Pip himself is ready to continue his own trial. Nevertheless, suggesting an evil less tractable to sociological cures, Dickens lets Orlick escape.

As a result of his sickness, Pip becomes a child again and completely dependent on Joe. For the first time in the narrative, Dickens

introduces the image of the blooming garden. Joe takes Pip for a ride in the countryside, "where the rich summer growth was already on the trees and on the grass, and sweet summer scents filled all the air" (443). He returns to the forge intending to marry Biddy and finds it all abloom with flowers. But he is too late to enter Biddy's garden. She has already married Joe. Pip's rebirth, like that of Arthur Clennam, cannot be too easily achieved. Pip must work and suffer for eleven years in an alien land. Only then can he return to the ruined garden where he will find an Estella who is able to feel waiting for him. Only then can they say good-bye to the old garden and their old selves and begin anew. Dickens does not lead them into another Eden. All he can do is give them each other. They must find their own answers in society. Perhaps, they too, like Wemmick, will live part of their day in the terrible gardens of Newgate and of society and then retire to a "Castle," with its own small garden, moated against the world.

4. Our Mutual Friend

"Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland.

Dickens wrote to Forster in April, 1855:

A country which is discovered to be in this tremendous condition as to its war affairs; with an enormous black cloud of poverty in every town which is spreading and deepening every hour, and not one man in two thousand knowing anything about, or believing in, its existence; with a non-working aristocracy, and a silent parliament, and everybody for himself and nobody for the rest; this is the prospect, and I think it a very deplorable one.¹¹

In the late novels, Dickens attempts to present this judgment poetically. In The Old Curiosity Shop he had envisioned the "beautiful and

innocent child" surrounded by dark rooms, gaunt suits of mail, grotesque faces grinning from wood and stone, dust, rust, decay, and ugly age, and seen this as the plight of the individual consciousness in his society. In the late novels the dust, rust, stone, decay, and dark rooms become symbols of the values of society and man's life in society. Each novel is structured around one or two of these images. In his last complete novel, Our Mutual Friend, Dickens brings all these images together. His attempts to utilize fairy-tale motifs also culminate in this, his darkest, novel.

In Great Expectations Dickens sees the whole of society enmeshed in a web of criminality. Society's acceptance of the notion of gentility based on unearned wealth is criminal; therefore, all the economic pursuits of society based on this principle are criminal. This theme, which is only present by implication in Great Expectations, is fully explored in Our Mutual Friend. The story begins with the violation of a dead body in order to obtain its gold. Hexam, the bird of prey, obtains his and his family's food from the dead. His former partner, Rogue Riderhood, hints that perhaps Hexam at times creates his own business. Mr. Venus also obtains a living from the dead. He "articulates" skeletons for the use of science. Old Harmon, whose fortune came from garbage collection, lived on the "dead" refuse of man, his excrement. The horrible occupations of these men are not unique in the world of Our Mutual Friend. They are simply extremes of all occupations. All social relationships in Our Mutual Friend are seen as a complex chain of predatory or criminal relationships.¹² All of society is involved in plundering both living and dead bodies. This is the social evil for which Dickens must find an objective correlative in the fairy-tale world.

The predators on the social organism in Our Mutual Friend can be divided into those who hypocritically refuse to acknowledge that it is a crime to live off the efforts of others; those who realize what they are doing but rationalize that everyone else is doing it also and that they themselves are being more honest by seeing their motives clearly; and those who are too weak to do anything about their position, though they see it clearly and may wish to improve it. In the first category are Podsnap and Veneering. Podsnap's world, as Dickens notes, is very small, both morally and geographically. His wishes and the workings of providence are inseparable. His life is confined to a mechanical "getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven" (128). He rids the world of unpleasant social realities (for example, the death by starvation of six people in the streets of London) by speaking of providence or by denying their existence. Podsnap, unlike Arthur Clennam, refuses to assume any responsibility for the misery and suffering of many living in his age. He is a complete egotist. Though Veneering is at present a "bran-new" person, if he achieves the inner sanctum of society, he will adopt the Podsnap manner, the manner of the new industrial classes. Lady Tippins is the aristocratic equivalent of Podsnap and Veneering. She also has no sense of social responsibility.

The Lammles belong to the second category. They are both conscious predators and after mistakenly being caught in each other's traps join forces against society. They are both experts in the confidence game which all of society is playing. Rigaud, the arch-criminal and gentleman in Little Dorrit, describes this game in which even friends

are sold: "I sell anything that commands a price. How do your lawyers live, your politicians, your intriguers, your men of the exchange! How do you live? . . . Have you sold no friend? . . . Effectively, sir . . . Society sells itself and sells me: and I sell Society" (LD, 749). Not only does the individual living in a modern society sell himself, he also sells that which does not belong to him, the efforts and products of other men. Dickens sees this criminal act at the basis of all civilized life.

Twemlow belongs to the third category. He is a very small tick attached to the hide of a rhinoceros, Lord Snigsworth. He realizes the weakness of his position but is too little a man to do anything about it. But although he has sold his body to society, he has not sold his soul. He can therefore defend Eugene when he marries beneath his station and can give a true definition of a gentleman: "I beg to say that when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion" (820).

Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood also belong to this category, though their weakness differs from that of Twemlow. They can see what is wrong with society but do not know what to do about it. They therefore adopt a pose of carelessness and indifference. They are members of a lost generation, a generation incapable of accepting the values of their parents and incapable of creating their own. They live on the small income supplied them by their families and continuously point to the absurdity of the values and efforts of those around them. As irritants on the social hide, they are disliked by almost all the members

of society, though their family backgrounds make them tolerable in the eyes of "Society."

In A Tale of Two Cities the central structural symbol is the tomb and burial alive. This imagery of death is continued in Our Mutual Friend. As has been pointed out, all of society is seen ghoulishly feasting on a dead body. Hexam cries, when he is avoided by his neighbors, "Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summ'at deadly sticking to my clothes? What's let loose upon us? Who loosed it?" (76) In a society in which man preys upon man like beasts in the jungle everything is contaminated by death. Dickens describes the home of the Golden Dustman, the symbol of his new-found wealth, as a "Dismal Swamp" inhabited by insects, alligators and a strange extinct bird with a wooden leg. They are all waiting to drag the Golden Dustman under, just as John Harmon was dragged under. Society's preoccupation with death is reflected in the environment, which is seen as an extension of man. On a dismal evening London's closed warehouses are described as having "an air of death about them." The sky descends like a dark lid on the dreary, dirty city making everything look as if it were in mourning (393). Dust is always blowing in and out of the maze of streets, the refuse of the "money-mills" (602).

But it is not only human predators from which man has to defend himself in this wasteland. Eugene, Mortimer and the police in their dark journey to find Hexam are threatened by objects:

All the objects among which they crept were so huge in contrast with their wretched boat as to threaten to crush it. Not a ship's hull, with its rusty iron links of cable run out of hawse-holes long discoloured with the iron's rusty tears, but seemed to be there with a fell intention. Not a figure-head but had the menacing look of bursting forward to run them down. Not a sluice-gate, or a painted scale upon a post or wall,

showing the depth of the water, but seemed to hint, like the dreadfully facetious Wolf in bed in Grandmamma's cottage, 'That's to drown you in, my dears!' (172-173)

Once the water's lust has been satisfied the winds take over and taunt the dead body of Hexam:

Father, was that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless and the dead? Was it you, thus baptized unto Death, with these flying impurities now flung upon your face? Why not speak, Father? Soaking into this filthy ground as you lie here, is your own shape. Did you never see such a shape soaked into your boat? Speak, Father. Speak to us, the winds, the only listeners left you! (174)

The bird of prey has himself become the prey of a more powerful predator, the fate of every individual living in society.

The dust, rust, and decay of Satis House, in Great Expectations the reality behind Pip's glorious fairy-tale illusion, become in Our Mutual Friend the dust-heaps of Harmony Jail, the reality behind the gold dust of the Golden Dustman. All the ideals and aspirations of man can be reduced to various kinds of dust which are then transformed into gold by an enterprising predator. In a completely materialistic, utilitarian society human qualities have value only when they have been reduced to inhuman, "dead" things. Thus Hexam prefers dead men to living men, as does Venus, and industry prefers "hands" to whole men. The dust-heap which is, in fact, wealth serves as a perfect symbol for Dickens' judgment of his society's worship of wealth.

The other major symbol or image of Our Mutual Friend is the river. It also represents an aspect of man's personality and one of the faces of society. The river which flows through the city is a liquid sewer. Like the men who navigate it, it is a predator, hungry for dead bodies. It is a source of food and therefore a symbol of life, but the only food it offers is that which society requires of it, and

that is, dead prey. It is therefore a symbol of death. To find the true, non-human image of the river, one must go inland to the river's source. Here in the countryside the river plays like a young child in a garden, undefiled by the pollution of the city, the creation of man and an image of his spirit. Bella and John see this face of the river when they walk in the country after the death of Betty Hidgen:

Perhaps the old mirror was never yet made by human hands, which, if all the images it had in its time reflected could pass across its surface again, would fail to reveal some scene of horror or distress. But the great serene mirror of the river seemed as if it might have reproduced all it had ever reflected between those placid banks, and brought nothing to the light save what was peaceful, pastoral, and blooming. (522)

In the country the river is truly a symbol of life and rebirth.

Our Mutual Friend, besides presenting a number of correspondences for states of the societal soul, offers a number of fairy-tale motifs which serve as a commentary and judgment of society. Boffin's inheritance of his miserly employer's wealth, in the eyes of his society, makes him a King Midas figure. He is the "Golden Dustman," who can turn dust into gold. But just as King Midas' gift turns out to be two-edged, so does the power of the Golden Dustman. His wealth creates a "Dismal Swamp" around him which is inhabited by all of the lowest predators and parasites in society. Bella Wilfer is also a parasite. The Golden Dustman's fairy-tale transformation of her brings out the most mercenary part of her personality. She tells her father, "Talk to me of love! . . . Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and there indeed we touch upon realities" (321). Boffin has to teach her that gold is, in fact, dust; that his society's worship of wealth is the worship of an idol with feet of dust. Bella must learn, like Pip, that the "true gold" is the gold of the heart (772). When Bella hears Boffin

rejecting Rokesmith's love for her and stating that it is inferior to money, she pleads -- "Oh! Make me poor again, Somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on!" (596) Society has forgotten that the "true gold" is the gold of the heart, and has elevated the worship of material things to a higher level than the worship of things of the spirit. The result is a jungle in which man eats man.

The Cinderella plot has already been mentioned in relation to Bella, who is a female Pip, but it also features in the relationship between Riah and Jenny and Lizzie. Jenny calls Riah her fairy godmother and describes him thus: "You see, you are so like the fairy godmother in the bright little books! You look so unlike the rest of the people, and so much as if you had changed yourself into that shape, just this moment, with some benevolent object" (433-434). Riah asks her if she has any wish that she wants granted, and Jenny replies that she would like her "bad boy" changed and then her back and legs set right. But when she realizes that her transformation would mean that she would lose the little happiness that she has had, particularly her friendship with Lizzie, she asks, as Bella does, for "Is" to be changed back to "Was." Fairy-tale transformations do not solve man's immediate problems; they only create new ones.

Another fairy-tale plot which Dickens employs for the first time in Our Mutual Friend is that of Little Red Ridinghood. This plot, with its emphasis on appearance and reality, is a particularly suitable commentary on a criminal, predatory society, a society which plays the "confidence game." Rogue Riderhood, because of his name, is the clearest example of the working of this motif. Riderhood, himself involved in the "murder" of John Harmon, swears to Lightwood that Hexam is guilty

in order that "the fruits of the sweat of [an honest man's] brow" may not be kept back. He is the wolf wearing grandmother's clothing; the predator wearing the clothes of the honest man. The Lammles wear their masks of honesty and helplessness so well that they trap each other. Once the mistake has been made they vow to play their roles so perfectly that they will ensnare the whole of "Society." Bradley Headstone hides his inner fire and his origins beneath the mask of a decent, mechanical young man. Wegg hides his opportunism and criminal tendencies beneath the pretense of wronged honesty. Lady Tippins, the representative of a dead aristocratic order, hides her deadness beneath the cracked mask of coquette. The Veneerings try to hide their "bran-newness" by a veneer of social pretension and possessions. Everyone in society is involved in acting a role. Everyone is aware of this fact, but there exists a tacit agreement that the farce will be played through to the end.

Just as the wolf at times wears grandmother's clothing, grandmother at times can be made to appear in wolf's clothing. This happens with Riah. His employer, a wolf in the guise of a whiskerless young man, forces him to adopt the mask of usurer. When Jenny sees this false face, she cries: "You are not the godmother at all! . . . You are the Wolf in the Forest, the wicked Wolf! And if ever my dear Lizzie is sold and betrayed, I shall know who sold and betrayed her!" (574) Even the innocent, in a criminal society, are made to appear guilty. Boffin, also, assumes a wolfish miser's mask in order to deal with Wegg and Bella.

What is the fate of an individual trapped in such a society? In Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Great Expectations the

vague hope is held out that the individual, by a change of heart, a return to the fairy-tale garden of the imagination, may be able to change his society. This garden appears briefly but darkly in Our Mutual Friend in the visions of Jenny and Riah's roof garden. Jenny, while hard at work, smells roses and fallen leaves about her and hears birds singing (239). In visionary moments she plays with beautiful children in white dresses who do not mock her like the neighborhood children. The only real garden in her life and Lizzie's, perhaps the only garden possible in her society, is Riah's roof garden with its blackened chimney tree and boxes of "humble flowers" and evergreens. Jenny is thankful to go there for the "rest." She sees the clouds rushing by and the arrows of gold pointing to the mountains in the sky and she feels dead. Jenny is dead in the sense that she is completely beyond the reach of the "wasting hands" of society. She calls to Riah, who has gone down to his business premises, to "Come back and be dead!" (281) Fledgeby asks her what it is like to feel dead and Jenny answers:

'Oh, so tranquil! . . . Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!' (281)

But Fledgeby cannot be dead in the way Jenny describes because his vision of life completely differs from hers. He does not feel the sufferings of others or hear their cries of pain. He is a bird of prey and the people Jenny pities are his victims. In fact, for Dickens, it is Jenny, Riah, and Lizzie who are alive and their society which is dead. John Harmon discovers, like Jenny, that he is only fully alive once he is dead in the eyes of society and has rid himself of his inheritance. Eugene, similarly, only lives after nearly dying. Death

wipes away the stain which darkens the human spirit in society, removes the psychological chains with which society binds the human consciousness.

In Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Great Expectations the fairy-tale happy ending is modified by Dickens and made poetically right and satisfying. The resolution of the problems of the characters is the result of a spiritual transformation which has rid them of the belief in the tractability of wish-fulfilling, shallow, magic wand solutions and any other distorted views of life. The character's reward is commensurate to the degree of his spiritual reform. For example, Pip must toil for many years in an alien land before he is rewarded with the hope of achieving the love of a chastened Estella. In Our Mutual Friend the fairy tale happy ending is not modified in this way. It therefore appears strained and almost gratuitous. Bella does achieve a rebirth, but her reward, the materialistic "good life" favored by her society, gives her little scope to live through her new vision. It is also questionable whether Wrayburn's transformation will survive in the real world. In fact, Dickens leaves the reader with a strong impression of how the novel could and perhaps should have ended. In the world of Our Mutual Friend, it would have been right for Boffin to be "spoilt by wealth"; for Rokesmith to be rejected by Bella and end his life in the gutter; for Bella to marry for wealth, like Fanny in Little Dorrit, and live miserably ever after; for Eugene to die, or if he lived to attempt to better himself, but, after repeated failure, to give up and abandon Lizzie; for Mrs. Boffin to die of a broken heart; and for Charlie Hexam to prosper. There is no answer to Alice's question, the question of any sensitive individual, in the world of Our Mutual Friend. Man is stuck in his self-created swamp, buried in heaps of his own excrement,

immersed in the polluted waters of the stream of life which he has made into a sewer. It does not matter where he wants to get to for all the direction signs have been lost and there is "No Exit." When man examines the world for meaning, it looks back at him noncommittally like the Cheshire Cat and then fades to an enigmatic grin.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The mid-nineteenth century in England was a time when the smoke billowing from "the money-mills" darkened the sky, and the tread of fire-breathing locomotives spreading the message of industrialism throughout the land made the earth tremble. It was also a time when the literary fairy tale emerged as a legitimate genre, and "fancy" opposed the forces of "hard facts." These two faces of the age -- the industrial and the imaginative -- were branded on the childish consciousness of Dickens, and it was almost inevitable that they would feature strongly in his work. The fairy tale was an inextricable part of his happy childhood memories before the move to London. The ugly face of industrialism had intruded into his life as a result of his experiences in the blacking warehouse. In his articles on the fairy tale, written for Household Words between 1850 and 1855, Dickens stated his belief that these two worlds could exist together, that one could find "Queen Mab's chariot among the steam engines." He believed that the future of his society rested on the preservation and propagation of the fairy tale. The fairy tale fostered the fancy of the individual, the garden of the imagination, and promoted humanitarian feelings, both of which, he felt, were necessary in a utilitarian age.

The fairy tale, for Dickens, thus became associated with an ideal vision of life, a vision which held that "Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything; and 'Nothing is, but thinking makes it so.'" This vision enabled Dickens to continue to

exist in an age noted for its worship of ugliness -- ranging from the monstrous money-mills of Coketown to the dust-catching bric-a-brac in the sunless, airless front parlours of every home. The physical ugliness of the age was in many cases a sign of its spiritual ugliness. The new industrial city was an image of the grasping, completely materialistic, and inhuman souls of the men who controlled the economy. Dickens desired to prevent the finer feelings of man, which he associated with the fairy tale and its vision of life, from withering in the breast of every individual born into society.

The two faces of society, embodied in the opposition between "hard facts" and "fancy," were represented in his work stylistically as well as thematically. Two bodies of material are present in the late novels: a realistic, almost documentary, picturing of social evils, and a fantastic, dream-like presentation of situation, setting, and character. These two bodies of material inter-act and each serves as a commentary on the other. In fact, by noting carefully the inter-action of the two styles, in each of the four last novels, changes in Dickens' attitude towards the fairy tale and its vision of life can be remarked. For example, the failure of fairy-tale transformations, as pointed out in the discussion of the individual novels in Chapter IV, serves to show the spiritual darkness of the real world and its tenacious hold on the individual. The realistic portrayal of social evils is thus enhanced and heightened by its juxtaposition with the fairy-tale world. But, at the same time, the futility of fairy-tale solutions and the difficulty of maintaining a fairy-tale garden of the imagination in the wasteland of society suggest that Dickens' early hope in the fairy-tale vision of life is ill-founded. The world is too much with us and "the friends of

our childhood," the fairy tales, cannot help us to escape or come to terms with it.

Dickens was very much preoccupied with the need for social reform in his age. But, unlike the political revolutionists, he believed that societal reform could occur only as a result of individual reform. The individual must undergo a change of mind. He must be reborn. This rebirth, as has been suggested, for Dickens, was associated with the fairy tale. The relationship between rebirth and the fairy tale, as presented in the four last novels, is a complex one. A spiritual rebirth cannot occur as a result of a fairy tale, magic wand transformation, because this fairy-tale solution has been tainted by the materialism of the age. The Dorrit family and Pip are aware only of the material implications of their transformation, only of their "great expectations." It is Little Dorrit who is aware of the spiritual obligations placed upon the family by its transformation. She is the one who helps the Plornishes create their "pastoral haven" in Bleeding Heart Yard and who looks after the needs of Maggie.

Authentic rebirth, in the novels, is associated with the garden of the imagination nurtured in childhood by the fairy tale. The individual, in Biblical terms, must become a child again before he can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Clennam achieves this kind of rebirth. Little Dorrit's love makes the wasteland within him, created by the teachings of his mother and society, bloom. Though they walk into the heart of the city, at the end of the novel, they take their garden with them. Pip also achieves the garden after much suffering, as do Darnay and Dr. Manette. But in these novels the garden becomes more and more inaccessible. Finally, in Our Mutual Friend, it exists in a completely

non-earthly form or a sentimentalized distortion. Jenny Wren sees a fairy-tale garden in which everything is possible in her visions. But she cannot fuse these visions with the reality of her harsh, everyday existence. The Rokesmith-Harmons get their artificial aviary with its gold and silver fish, mosses, water lilies, and "all manner of wonders." Dickens suggests that they will probably make good use of their wealth, and will lead happy lives. But they have accepted the values of their age. Their rebirth, therefore, is not complete. In fact, Dickens no longer believes that rebirth is possible. He no longer believes that "Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything, and 'Nothing is, but thinking makes it so.'" There is no answer to Alice's question of where she should go. All roads lead inward in a labyrinth, and the only exit has been blocked by the demon who controls the maze.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

¹Dates of important historical events and general historical information are obtained from Brinton, et al, Modern Civilization.

²Forster, Life of Dickens, I, 3.

³Ibid., II, 386.

⁴See Chesterton's study, Charles Dickens.

⁵Quoted by Ford, Dickens and His Readers, 101.

⁶Ruskin, "A Note on Hard Times," The Dickens Critics, 47.

⁷Shaw, Introduction to Hard Times, vii-viii.

⁸Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Dickens, Dali and Others, 70-71.

⁹Taine, in his History of English Literature, compares Dickens' sensibility to "the feverish sensibility of a woman." This "monomaniac vision" is described thus: "You will grasp a personage in a single attitude, you will see of him only that and you will impose it upon him from beginning to end. His face will always have the same expression, and this expression will be almost always a grimace" (211).

¹⁰Masson, "Dickens and Thackeray," The Dickens Critics, 35.

¹¹Gissing, Dickens, 68.

¹²Chesterton, Charles Dickens, 87.

¹³Symons, Charles Dickens, 50.

¹⁴Morse, "Our Mutual Friend," The Dickens Critics, 199-200.

Other critics who deal with aspects of Dickens' world in terms of the fairy tale are: Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," Sewanee Review, LVIII, 419-438; Stone, "The Novel as Fairy Tale: Dickens' Dombey and Son," English Studies, XLVII, 1-27 and "Fire, Hand, and Gate: Dickens' Great Expectations," Kenyon Review, XXIV, 662-691; and McMaster,

"Dickens and the Horrific," Dalhousie Review, XXXVIII, 18-28. McMaster also discusses the influence of the fairy tales Dickens read as a child on his style and his vision of life in his unpublished doctoral thesis, Charles Dickens: A Study of the Imagery and Structure of His Novels.

CHAPTER II

¹For a discussion of the new industrial city see Lewis Mumford's The City in History, Chapter XV: "Paleotechnic Paradise: Coketown." He writes:

Up to the nineteenth century, there had been a rough balance of activities within the city. Though work and trade were always important, religion and art and play claimed their full share of the townsman's energies. But the tendency to concentrate on economic activities, and to regard as waste the time or effort spent on other functions, at least outside the home, had been growing steadily since the sixteenth century. If capitalism tended to expand the province of the marketplace and turn every part of the city into a negotiable commodity, the change from organized urban handicraft to large scale factory production transformed the industrial towns into dark hives, busily puffing, clanking, screeching, smoking for twelve and fourteen hours a day, sometimes going around the clock. The slavish routine of the mines, whose labor was an international punishment for criminals, became the normal environment of the new industrial worker. (446)

²Quoted by Brinton, et al, Modern Civilization, 412.

³Ibid., 413.

⁴House, Dickens World, 215.

⁵In their discussion of the New Poor Law in The Bleak Age the Hammonds state: "The poor Rate had grown into a vast burden because men and women were encouraged to find in subsidies from the rates the livelihood they ought to earn, and because the employer was encouraged to find in those subsidies a way of saving his pocket" (96).

⁶All quotations from the works of Dickens are taken from the New Oxford Illustrated Dickens and will be identified by page number in the remainder of the thesis.

⁷Engels writes in his Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844:

The middle classes have a truly extraordinary conception of society. They really believe that all human beings (themselves excluded) and indeed all living things and inanimate objects have a real existence only if they make money or help to make it. Their sole happiness is

derived from gaining a quick profit. They feel pain only if they suffer a financial loss. Every single human quality with which they are endowed is grossly debased by selfish greed and love of gain. (321)

⁸In Our Mutual Friend Dickens points out the inadequacy of the curriculum in the Ragged Schools. He presents the ludicrous situation arising from the insistence on the childishness and innocence of all attending the schools:

Young women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. (214)

⁹See London's Underworld, excerpts from London Labour and the London Poor, edited by Peter Quennell, for a more realistic picture of London's criminal world.

¹⁰Trilling, preface to Little Dorrit, New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, v.

¹¹House, Dickens World, 28-29.

¹²Quoted by Forster, Life of Dickens, II, 387.

¹³Orwell, Dickens, Dali and Others, 71. For a discussion of Dickens' treatment of conversion and moral development see Barbara Hardy, "The Change of Heart in Dickens," VS, V (1961), 49-67.

¹⁴Ruskin, The Dickens Critics, 47.

¹⁵Symons, Charles Dickens, 88.

¹⁶Kettle, "Dickens: Oliver Twist," The Dickens Critics, 263.

¹⁷Taine, History of English Literature, 190.

¹⁸Kettle, Dickens Critics, 259.

CHAPTER III

¹Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," HW, No. 39 (December 21, 1850).

²Quoted by Forster, Life of Dickens, I, 8, as applying to Dickens' own childhood as well as that of David Copperfield.

³Greene, "The Young Dickens," The Lost Childhood, 54.

⁴All biographical information is obtained from Forster's Life, and Johnson's critical-biography, Charles Dickens.

⁵Dickens, "A Christmas Tree."

⁶Forster, Life of Dickens, I, 7.

⁷Avery, Nineteenth Century Children, 16.

⁸*Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁹*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁰Darton, Children's Books, 99.

¹¹Quoted by Green, Tellers of Tales, 18. Italics are mine.

¹²Davis, The Flint and the Flame, 149.

¹³Dickens, "The School of the Fairies," HW, No. 275 (June 30, 1855).

¹⁴Dickens, "A Preliminary Word," HW, No. 1 (March 30, 1850).

¹⁵Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies," HW, No. 184 (October 1, 1853).

¹⁶Dickens, "Prince Bull: A Fairy Tale," Works of Charles Dickens, Vol. XXIX, 441-446.

¹⁷Dickens, To Be Read at Dusk, 340-367.

¹⁸Quoted by Avery, Nineteenth Century Children, 134-135.

¹⁹Darton, Children's Books, 221.

²⁰Listed by Avery, Nineteenth Century Children, 44.

²¹Ibid., 45.

²²Ibid., 46-48.

²³For a discussion of the influence of the writings of Smollett, Fielding and Sterne on Dickens' work see Earle Davis, The Flint and the Flame.

²⁴McMaster, "Dickens and the Horrific," DR, XXXVIII, 19.

²⁵Forster, Life of Dickens, I, 31.

²⁶Morse, The Dickens Critics, 202.

²⁷Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," Tree and Leaf, 60.

²⁸Avery, Nineteenth Century Children, 52.

²⁹Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper," Selected Poetry and Prose, 26.

³⁰Robbe-Grillet in the essay "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy," in For a New Novel, states his theory that traditional novelists were humanists, that they believed that "the world is man" (52). This belief was expressed in terms of the metaphor, in which an inanimate object became a being with an individual existence described in terms of human abilities. Man thus reconciled the world to himself.

³¹Coveney, in Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature, discusses Dickens' preoccupation with the child in his novels in the context of Rousseau's ideas on education, the "Cult of Sensibility" and the "Romantic Child." He describes Dickens as continuing to see the world with children's eyes throughout his life (118).

³²Dickens, "The Noble Savage," Plays, Poems, and Miscellanies, 481-487.

³³Dickens, "A Christmas Tree," HW, No. 39 (December 21, 1850).

³⁴Quoted by Johnson, Charles Dickens, II, 911.

CHAPTER IV

¹The British public was well-informed of what was happening on the war front by the despatches of William Howard Russell, a corres-

pondent for The Times. Nicolas Bentley, who edited Russell's despatches from the Crimea, writes in an introduction:

During the Crimean War it was due to Russell's despatches from the scene more than to any other single factor that the British government's mis-handling of affairs, and the gross negligence of the War Office in particular, came to light and that the resignation of Lord Aberdeen's cabinet was brought about. This timely event, had it been delayed even for a little while longer, must have resulted inevitably in a disaster to the British army far worse than any that the Russians had succeeded in inflicting upon it. It was not merely from a shortage of guns and ammunition that the army suffered, though these were scarce enough; it also lacked such simple necessities as clothing, fuel, medical supplies and, not least important, encouragement from an efficient and determined administration at home. (11)

²Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, part I.

³McMaster in his unpublished doctoral thesis points out in detail the parallels between Little Dorrit and The Divine Comedy. He sees the inverted moral order of Little Dorrit as parallel to the "upside down hierarchy of hell."

⁴Mill writes in his essay, "Civilization": "One of the effects of a high state of civilization upon character, is a relaxation of individual energy: or rather the concentration of it within the narrow sphere of the individual's money-getting pursuits" (56).

⁵The underground man writes, in Notes from the Underground, "We are all divorced from life, we are all cripples, every one of us, more or less. We are so divorced from it that we feel at times a sort of loathing for real 'living life,' and so cannot bear to be reminded of it. . . . Come, try, give any one of us, for instance, a little more independence, untie our hands, widen the spheres of our activity, relax the control, and we . . . yes, I assure you . . . we should be begging to be under control again at once" (297).

⁶Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies," HW, No. 184 (October 1, 1853).

⁷Dickens, "The School of the Fairies," HW, No. 275 (June 30, 1855).

⁸Quoted by Johnson, Charles Dickens, II, 841.

⁹See Stone, "Fire, Hand and Gate: Dickens' Great Expectations," for a sophisticated, archetypal treatment of the fairy tale elements in the novel.

¹⁰Mayhew, Mayhew's Characters, selections from London Labour and the London Poor, xix.

¹¹Forster, Life of Dickens, II, 387.

¹²For a discussion of the predation theme, see Lanham, "Our Mutual Friend: The Birds of Prey," VNL, 24, 6-12.

JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS

DR - Dalhousie Review

EC - Essays in Criticism

ELH - Journals of English Literary History

ES - English Studies

HW - Household Words

KR - Kenyon Review

REL - Review of English Literature

SR - Sewanee Review

TSLI - Texas Studies in Literature and Language

UKCR - University of Kansas City Review

VNL - Victorian Newsletter

VS - Victorian Studies

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